

**THE
TWIN
RING
MYSTERY**

MILDRED A. WIRT



"I COULD SCARCELY BELIEVE MY EYES. THERE WAS OUR
GIMMAL RING IN HIS WALLET!"

"Twin Ring Mystery"

Page 170

THE TWIN RING MYSTERY

BY
MILDRED A. WIRT

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MYSTERY STORIES FOR GIRLS

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THE TWIN RING MYSTERY

By Mildred A. Wirt

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THE TWIN RING MYSTERY

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The Twin Ring Mystery

Chapter I

PIRATE INN

OH, BOB, I'm almost afraid to meet her!" Gail Carrington, seated at the wheel of a de luxe, mahogany motor-boat, gave a little shiver of nervous anticipation as she arose to survey the frontage of the wharf. She was tall and slender in her black wool bathing suit, and only a shade less brown than her companion, a broad-shouldered, muscular youth who was engaged in making the boat fast to the dock.

"Nothing to be afraid of, Gail," he replied cheerfully.

"But there is. Maybe Joan won't like the same things we like. Swimming for instance and boats and beaches."

"Oh, you worry too much. She's due here now. Here, let me help you up." He reached down to assist her to the wharf but Gail spurned the proffered hand, leaping nimbly from the boat.

"I know I'm being a little silly, Bob. It's just that Crystal Beach is frightfully dull at this time of year if one doesn't enjoy water sports. I do so want Joan to have a splendid time."

"This Bernell girl may fit into our scheme of things better than we expect."

"I've never seen her," Gail admitted doubtfully, "but Aunt Ella tells me she goes to Europe nearly every summer with her parents. And this year she's coming to Crystal Beach because she thinks it might be more *fun*! Can you imagine that?"

Bob shook his head gloomily. In his estimation, any person who deliberately chose Crystal Beach for a vacation in preference to a fine trip abroad was a hopeless optimist.

"How long are we to wait for her?" he inquired, glancing at his wrist watch.

"Aunt Ella said she would meet us here at four o'clock. It must be that now."

"Ten after," Bob reported. He caught a glimpse of a girl coming toward them and added in a hastily lowered tone: "Do you suppose she can be Joan? She has a suitcase."

Eagerly, if somewhat anxiously, they surveyed the approaching stranger. She was an attractive, slim girl of perhaps fifteen, dressed in a simple dark blue traveling suit. They were convinced that she must be Joan Bernell for she smiled warmly as they hurried to meet her.

"I'm sure you are, Gail!" she cried enthusiastically. "Your aunt, Mrs. Huston, wrote me such nice things about you. Pirate Inn, too, and the wonderful times you have there!"

Gail experienced a slight sinking sensation as she realized that her aunt's glowing reports might have given the newcomer a fanciful picture of summer life at Crystal Beach. But she liked Joan. She gripped the extended hand and Bob quickly seized upon the heavy suitcase.

They both were a trifle embarrassed, for Joan's poise and friendly manner contrasted so strikingly with their

notion of what she would be like, that it left them at a loss for the right words. Her reddish hair bespoke spirit too, and the deep coat of tan proclaimed that she had more than a nodding acquaintance with the out-of-doors. To hide her momentary confusion, Gail introduced Bob Bartley.

"He's a champion swimmer," she explained proudly, "and the best life-guard at Crystal Beach."

"The laziest, you mean," Bob corrected. Joan's twinkling, friendly eyes made him conscious of his appearance. "I hope you'll excuse my costume, Miss Bernell. Gail and I just finished our dip a few minutes ago and didn't take time to change into our street clothes."

"Don't apologize," she pleaded, "and please don't call me Miss Bernell. At home I practically live in a bathing suit."

"Then you do swim!" Gail cried in delight.

"A little. I live in an inland city, you know, but we have several nice pools."

Joan turned to gaze out across the stretch of blue water. The waves were higher than usual, but from the immobility of the girl's face, Gail and Bob gained no hint as to her thoughts. They hoped fervently that she would not be afraid to swim in rough water and that she liked motor-boats.

"It's fortunate that you enjoy the water," Gail observed pleasantly. "Bob and I were afraid you might find things dull here, especially as the regular 'season' isn't on."

"Dull?" Joan echoed in surprise. "Why, this is my first visit to Florida and I'd simply hate it if there were crowds. Honestly, I'm carried away with the idea of living in an old ship. You call it Pirate Inn, don't you?"

"It's just a tea room with a fancy name," Gail remarked indifferently.

Amused at such a prosaic attitude, Joan bantered: "I've heard of persons who did not appreciate their environment."

"Maybe I'm that sort myself but I've lived at Pirate Inn so long that the romance has worn off. After all a tea room is only a tea room and the fact that it was made from an old ship doesn't change the unexciting routine of food, customers and dishes to wash!"

Bob did not feel that this drab description was entirely fair to Pirate Inn. Mrs. Huston's tea room was one of the most picturesque places along the coast and visitors often traveled many miles out of their way for the privilege of dining there.

"Pirate Inn has an unusual history," he ventured by way of defense. "For instance, there's the locket."

"Oh, *that*. Well, you see, Joan, Aunt Ella found an old trunk in the ship, and inside of it we discovered the locket."

"This sounds mysterious to me," Joan commented quickly.

"I'll show you the locket when we reach Pirate Inn. The story must wait, too. It would take ages to tell it now and Aunt Ella will be expecting us. You're not afraid of boats, are you?"

"Not in the least," Joan declared instantly.

They had reached the wharf's edge, and Bob, after stowing Joan's suitcase aboard the boat, assisted her into the cockpit. He noted approvingly that she wore sensible shoes with flat heels and that she did not clutch at his supporting arm when the boat tilted slightly under her weight.

Joan cast an admiring glance over the speedboat's fine

mahogany deck and glittering brasswork, sighing contentedly as she sank back against the comfortable leather cushions.

Gail took her place at the wheel and Bob cast off the painter. The powerful motor started. Under Gail's guiding hand, they slowly eased away from the wharf. When they were a safe distance from the other boats which floated at their moorings, she switched into first speed and they shot away, leaving a long trail of foam.

"How beautifully we took that turn," Joan laughed. "I'd love to own a boat such as this!"

Gail explained above the roar of the wind in their ears that *The Minx* belonged to her aunt.

"Aunt Ella allows me to use it whenever I like," she added. "Bob has his own boat."

"That's a flattering way to express it," Bob declared. "I built it myself. I bought a motor second hand and it's always giving its dying gasp when I'm miles from shore!"

Gail had headed *The Minx* across the bay toward a long stretch of white beach, sparsely fringed with gently waving palm trees. Presently, Bob indicated a small island off the port bow.

"That's Turkill Isle, Joan. You'll hear more about it, for every summer our swimming club sponsors a girls' race. The contestants start at the Crystal Beach wharf, swim out to Turkill and return. It's one of the big sporting events of the summer season."

Joan studied the indicated course with keen interest.

"It must be a fairly long swim," she commented.

"Not as long as it appears from here. Only two miles."

Joan turned to Gail. "You're competing, of course?"

"No, I'm afraid not. I don't think it would look just right since Aunt Ella is furnishing the trophy—it's that locket we were telling you about." She laughed shortly

and swerved the boat sharply to avoid passing over a floating board which lay directly ahead. "I guess that isn't my real reason though. The truth is, I haven't a chance to win. I imagine Margery Annas will capture the locket. She's a fine swimmer."

"And knows it," Bob murmured under his breath.

Joan did not hear him. Eagerly, she questioned Gail about the locket, declaring that she considered it an unusual idea to offer jewelry as a trophy in place of the more ordinary loving cup.

"It isn't an ordinary locket either," Gail said proudly. "Aside from its queer history, it's the loveliest thing you ever saw."

Before Joan could question her concerning the strange story of the locket, Bob nodded his head toward a high-powered speedboat which was bearing toward them. Gail readily recognized the craft which belonged to Margery Annas.

"Better give her a wide berth, Gail. We're coming to Turkill Isle," Bob advised tersely. "You know she holds the record for collisions as well as for swimming."

"I know," Gail returned a trifle grimly, altering her course with a slight flip of the wheel. "But I mean to have my rights in the channel."

They were drawing close to Turkill Isle where the waters were dotted with occasional warning buoys which marked submerged rocks. Gail knew the channel well, and often declared that she could steer her way blindfolded among the shoals.

Now she estimated the speed of the approaching boat, calculating that it would pass *The Minx* well beyond the head of the island. Bob made the same deduction but his eye lingered for a moment upon the warning buoys which floated between Gail and the island. He felt that

there was ample room to pass in safety even should Margery crowd them as she showed every sign of doing.

Gail kept a wary eye upon the oncoming boat. She had throttled down as soon as they had entered the narrow channel, but Margery, disregarding the ruling which plainly stated the maximum speed permitted at such a dangerous passage, had slackened her speed only slightly. Gail realized with a faint sensation of uneasiness that the two boats would pass, not at the point she had anticipated, but at the far end of the island, the most dangerous point in the narrow channel. She was not afraid, but she felt that Margery was driving toward them at a dangerous speed.

Involuntarily, Gail uttered a startled, half choked cry of alarm, for from behind the screen of trees, there had emerged a row-boat loaded with a group of laughing children.

Too late, Margery Annas saw the danger and tried to give *The Minx* more room to pass. Gail saw at a glance that she could not make it. To avoid striking the row-boat she must take her chance of crashing with Margery's boat or risk the shoals. Grimly, she swung the wheel, turning the boat sharply toward the warning buoy.

"Stand by for a smash!" she warned tersely.

As Margery's speedboat flashed by, Joan and Bob braced themselves. Peering down into the clear blue water, they could see ugly, jagged rocks and at any moment they expected to strike one. They held their breath as they felt the boat gently scrape.

The next instant the rocks were behind them and they were in safe water again.

"Good work, Gail!" Bob praised quietly. "We had a narrow escape."

"I thought we were gone when the boat scraped," Gail

said, a trifle shaken. "I hope we didn't damage the keel."

"I don't believe we struck hard enough for that," Joan declared. "I scarcely felt the jar at all. You were splendid, Gail!"

Gail flushed at the praise and cast an admiring glance at her new friend. Joan had remained cool in the emergency. Bob too, felt that Joan had stood up well under fire.

"Margery had no right to come through the channel so fast," he said testily. "And if she'd been attending to her steering, she'd have seen that row-boat rounding the head of the island. She had a clear view but ours was obscured by the trees."

He turned to gaze after the speedboat which was heading for the opposite shore, its owner apparently undaunted by the near-collision which had been averted only by quick thinking and clever steering on the part of Gail.

"I have half a notion to report her," he declared feelingly.

"It would do no good," Gail returned. "She's been warned before, but until her license is taken from her, she'll never change. She loves to take chances."

The Minx rapidly drew near shore and Gail cut down the motor. From the wharf a youthful appearing woman in a white dress could be seen waving her hand.

"That's Aunt Ella," Gail identified. "Not a word of this to her. It would only worry her unnecessarily."

Mrs. Huston called out a gay greeting as the boat eased to a mooring. Warmly she welcomed Joan, remarking that she was the very picture of her mother whom she had known in their college days, many years before.

Bob made the boat fast and unloaded Joan's luggage. He then turned to leave, but Mrs. Huston called him back.

"Do come along with us to the Inn for supper, Bob. We're having chicken and biscuits."

"Sorry," Bob returned regretfully, "but I'm due to guard at the beach in ten minutes."

"You'll not miss the masquerade party tonight?" Gail inquired anxiously.

"Hardly. You won't know me when I'm all togged out as a bold, bad pirate."

Gail picked up Joan's light suitcase and they carried it between them, following Mrs. Huston down the well-worn path leading from the beach to the tea shop. Gail pointed out various points of interest along the shore and was pleased at her companion's enthusiasm. Already she was confident they would become the best of friends.

"You can see the inn from here," she said a moment later, pausing by a stately royal palm.

The tea shop was set back some distance from the beach on a slight knoll which permitted an unobstructed view of the bay. Joan had expected to see a modern ship but Pirate Inn bore slight resemblance to the sea-going steamer from which it had been remodeled. Instead, with its newly constructed poop and forecastle, it stood forth as an ancient brig. To the right of the upper deck, a lifeboat hung from the davits; life preservers were interspersed along the railing and from the tip of the highest mast a "skull and crossbones" fluttered in the breeze.

"What a quaint old ship!" Joan exclaimed admiringly. "It looks as though it had stepped right out of the seventeenth century."

"It's really very modern," Mrs. Huston laughed. "The portholes are nearly all that remain of the original boat."

"What ever gave you the idea of converting a ship into a tea shop?" Joan inquired curiously of her hostess. "And where did you find your boat?"

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"You might say the waves washed it up to me," Mrs. Huston smilingly responded. "Probably you remember reading about the hurricane which struck Florida in the fall of 1926?"

"It was dreadful," Gail interposed as Joan nodded. "Houses blown down, trees torn up, and wreckage everywhere."

"During the storm a number of small vessels were wrecked," Mrs. Huston continued. "*The Breneman*, a small steamer, was washed ashore here. Attempts were made to salvage it but finally the owners decided it was not worth the expense. A few years ago, learning the ship was to be dismantled, I bought it for a small sum and converted it into the inn you now see. Thanks to the tourists, the enterprise has been a paying one."

Crossing the cool porch a few minutes later, Joan saw that the entire front of the ship had been torn away, to be replaced by full length glass windows. Passing through the hall she caught a glimpse of a charming dining room, already lighted with candles for the expected dinner guests.

"Our living quarters are at the rear," Gail explained, leading the way to a pleasant suite of rooms which overlooked the bay. "We're to share the same room if you don't mind."

Joan did not mind in the least. As soon as she was comfortably settled, Mrs. Huston excused herself and hurried away to the kitchen, leaving the girls to themselves. While Gail changed from her bathing suit, Joan unpacked her suitcase. But they were not too busy to carry on a running conversation.

Already, Gail had made up her mind that for an only child, Joan was not in the least spoiled. She, too, was an only child, though her parents were no longer living.

Gail could not recall a time when she had not lived with her aunt, first in a large stucco house on Lincoln street and then at Pirate Inn.

She had grown up with Bob Bartley and neither had ever been conscious of the gap in their ages. He had taught her all that she knew of swimming and had corrected her golf stroke and improved her tennis. Bob was a junior at college, earning a portion of his expenses by life-guarding at Crystal Beach. He had won no less than six medals in swimming and life-saving, but few of his friends had ever seen any of them.

"Your aunt seems to be tremendously interested in sports," Joan remarked, sorting her clothing into neat piles. "I suppose she's a fine swimmer too."

"She still swims, of course, but she hasn't much time for it now." Gail dropped a pile of coat hangers on the bed for Joan to use, noting with satisfaction that she had brought suitable dresses. "Aunt Ella has sponsored the Turkill Isle swim for three years now. She always furnishes the cups. This year it will be the locket."

"It seems to me that a great deal goes on here at Crystal Beach," Joan declared. "Swimming races, parties and everything. I hope you're not giving this masquerade to-night for my benefit."

"Well, not entirely. Our Swimmers' Club has a party at the Inn every few months and Bob, who is our president, thought it would be a fine idea to set the date for tonight, since you were coming. I hope you're not too tired to enjoy it."

"Goodness, no! I never felt more thoroughly alive in my life. It must be the Florida air. But I have no costume."

With a gesture, Gail brushed aside this objection.

"Oh, that's easily arranged. We have several extra costumes in the storeroom. It's to be a pirate party."

-

"How are you dressing, Gail?"

"I'm going as Colonel Bonnet, the gentleman pirate of Barbadoes who grew tired of a sedate life and turned to roving the sea." Gail sighed wistfully. "Oh, how I wish the days of glorious adventure weren't over."

Joan regarded her companion with mischievous eyes.

"But are they?" she demanded. "You know, ever since I set eyes on Pirate Inn, I've had the strangest feeling. Just as if something queer might happen here!"

A STRANGE TROPHY

IN THE storeroom on the upper floor of Pirate Inn, Gail and Joan found several boxes filled with masquerade costumes. In her search for pirate garb, Gail ran across a number of costumes which reminded her of other parties she had attended and she paused in her hunt to tell Joan about them. A Mother Goose outfit reminded her of a nursery book masquerade while a powdered wig brought a long account of a Colonial ball. Suddenly she looked at her wrist watch and exclaimed: "Why, it's six o'clock already and we haven't even had supper."

The garments then flew from the boxes in earnest and in a surprisingly short time Joan's arms were laden with boots, a velvet cloak, and a cocked hat. Half way to the door with her plunder, she involuntarily paused, for her eyes had been drawn to a number of interesting objects which she wished she might examine.

"What a darling old spinning wheel!" she exclaimed. "And that battered trunk—why, it's such an odd shape. It must be very old."

"I can't say as to its age," Gail returned, "but I do know there's a queer story connected with it if only it could be unraveled."

"And can't it be?"

"I'm afraid not. Years ago—oh, there's Aunt Ella calling us to supper."

Hastily, they left the storeroom, carefully locking the door behind them.

"I'm saving up a lot of questions I mean to ask later," Joan declared as they skipped down the stairs. "But I guess they can wait until after supper."

The table had been laid in Mrs. Huston's private dining room near a window which framed a view of the ocean with a charming glimpse of a tall lighthouse in the distance.

"Joan is masquerading as Captain Kidd," Gail informed her aunt when they were seated at the table. "But she will prove more demure than wicked looking, I think. She really needs a deadly weapon."

"I suppose you're hinting for the cutlass that hangs on the dining room wall," Mrs. Huston smiled. "I'll be very glad to donate it for such a worthy cause."

Dinner was quickly dispatched for it was growing late and the girls knew they must hurry if they were to dress and be on hand to greet the party guests. Joan was soon ready, as her costume was a perfect fit, but Gail was not so fortunate with hers and a number of alterations were necessary. While the girls frantically stitched, ripped and pinned, Mrs. Huston welcomed the early arrivals.

At length Gail was made presentable and they hurried to the dining room which had been cleared of tables and cleverly decorated with reminders of buccaneer days. Black paper pennants, decorated with skull and crossbones, hung from the ceiling while a huge pasteboard cutlass dangled menacingly over the heads of the costumed "pirates" who fluttered about with their dance programs.

"Which one is Bob?" Joan questioned, surveying the grotesque group.

"Look for the most blood-thirsty appearing pirate in the lot," Gail suggested. "He's masquerading as Blackbeard."

"I think I see him," Joan declared an instant later.

"He's hiding behind all those whiskers!"

"Let's go over and offer him some raw meat!" Gail chuckled, and together they walked over to greet the hairy monster. As they approached he lunged toward them, baring his teeth in a comic attempt at ferocity.

"Oh, Bob, you look more like an exploded hair mat-tress than a pirate," Gail bantered.

Bob's hearty laugh disclosed his identity.

"You two don't look like such wicked buccaneers yourselves," he responded. "When does the dancing start?"

"In a few minutes. The orchestra is tuning up now. I thought we might show Joan the locket before the party gets into swing."

The three crossed the room to a wide mantel upon which were displayed a long row of silver loving cups and medals.

"All yours?" Joan gasped, gazing at Gail in awe.

"Mercy, no. I never won anything in my life. Some of the trophies belong to the Yacht Club and the others to Aunt Ella."

Gail removed a leather jewel case from the shelf, and lifting the cover, presented it to Joan.

"This is the locket we were telling you about. Aunt Ella has been induced to offer it as a trophy to the winner of the Turkill Isle swim."

Joan gave a little gasp of delight as she viewed the oval shaped trinket which hung from a slender velvet ribbon. It was of enamelled gold, exquisite in workman-ship, with an odd flower design standing in relief.

"It's lovely!" she exclaimed admiringly. "I never saw anything like it before—not even in the most exclusive jewel-ry stores."

"I'd not give it away if it were mine," Gail commented.

Joan removed the locket from its case, held it in her

hand for a moment and then thoughtfully studied the floral design.

"Try it on," Gail suggested.

Joan could not resist the temptation. She slipped it about her white throat and Gail led her to a mirror that she might view the effect.

"It's stunning, Joan. Wear it this evening if you like."

"I'm afraid it's a little out of keeping with my costume," Joan laughed. Carefully, she removed the locket and returned it to its case.

"You suggested that it has a history," she reminded Gail.

"Yes, it's connected with that trunk you saw in the storeroom. When Aunt Ella remodeled the old ship, she ran across the trunk in one of the abandoned staterooms. I think the room walls had been battered in—anyway, the trunk was well hidden until the carpenters started to tear out the partitions. Evidently, the trunk had been overlooked when the ship owners stripped the vessel."

"And was the locket found inside the trunk?" Joan asked eagerly.

"Yes, but not right at first. One day when Aunt Ella was having the trunk moved to the storeroom, someone let it drop. The under part of the lid fell out, and there, hidden in a little secret compartment, was the locket and an old diary."

Joan's eyes danced with excitement. She was more intrigued than she cared to disclose over this strange tale which Gail related in such off-hand fashion.

"And did the trunk contain only the locket and the diary?" she questioned.

"Oh, no, there were a few other things. Clothing of the sort a young girl would take on an ocean voyage. Nothing of consequence however."

Joan looked slightly troubled.

"But tell me, Gail, why was the trunk never claimed?"

"Your guess is as good as mine. As you know, the original ship which was named *The Breneman* was wrecked during the hurricane. Everything was in confusion after the storm. I was only a youngster at the time, but I still remember the horror of that night."

"Were many lives lost in the wreck?" Joan asked.

"No, that's the remarkable part. The ship owners claimed that no one was lost, but there were rumors that one or two passengers had been lost overboard before the Coast Guards reached the scene. It's possible the owner of the trunk was drowned."

"At any rate," Bob added, "all luggage was claimed after the wreck except this one trunk. No one knew it had been overlooked until Mrs. Huston found it years after the disaster."

"She advertised for the owner," Gail explained, "but no one ever came to claim the trunk. Apparently, the girl had no relatives or friends, for in all these years, there's never been an inquiry."

"And was there nothing inside the trunk to establish the owner's identity?"

"No, Aunt Ella went through everything, even the little diary. It offered no clue."

Joan was silent for a moment as she stared thoughtfully down at the tiny locket. It was difficult for her to accept the trinket in the same matter-of-fact manner as her companions. She wondered why it had been hidden in the lid of the old trunk, and it seemed odd that the diary had revealed no information concerning the owner.

"This locket must be valuable," she mused, half aloud. "Just supposing that the owner of the trunk did survive

the wreck, then wouldn't it seem rather queer that the girl never returned to claim her luggage?"

Gail nodded soberly.

"I think so, but Aunt Ella is firmly convinced there is no mystery about it. She believes the girl lost her life that night of the storm. I've always had a feeling that she may have escaped. I can't say why I believe it—I just do."

"Trust girls to go by their feelings," Bob teased. "If there ever was any mystery it's been dead too long to exhumed."

"I suppose we are romancing," Gail admitted. "If Aunt Ella thought there was the slightest doubt that the owner of the trunk had not been lost at sea she'd never offer this locket as a racing trophy. She wasn't very eager to do it in the first place, only the members of the club kept begging her to offer it as a prize instead of the cup she usually awards."

"Well, there isn't much danger that anyone will claim the locket after so many years," Bob returned. "Mrs. Huston advertised in half a dozen papers at the time she found the trunk."

"The locket seems almost too nice to give away," Joan commented.

"Yes, it does," Gail agreed. "And the chances are very good that Margery Annas will win it. She's a fine swimmer."

"I'd like to see the girls put on a better race this year than last," Bob remarked. "It's becoming a habit for Margery to win—"

Gail plucked at his sleeve. "Sh! She's coming now!"

Joan turned to see a tall, heavily built girl in evening dress moving toward them. Of those who had gathered at the Inn, she alone had failed to wear masquerade costume.

Gail greeted her politely and because she was the hostess waited for Margery to mention their narrow escape from collision at Turkill Isle. Margery ignored the subject. She would have turned to greet another group of young people had Gail not introduced Joan. The latter spoke pleasantly and continued to smile unperturbed as Margery made an automatic, impersonal response. An instant later, the girl turned her back to engage Bob in conversation, but he was not in as charitable a mood as Gail and Joan.

"Weren't you shooting through Turkill Isle channel pretty fast this afternoon?" he demanded gruffly.

"Oh, no faster than the law allows," Margery returned lightly. "It was all the fault of that stupid row-boat. The head of the island always has been a dangerous place. The channel should be held clear for motor-boats only."

"It's safe enough—" Bob began, in a tone which warned Gail that he intended to say something cutting. To forestall him, she rushed into the gap.

"We were just showing Joan the locket, Margery."

The bored expression left the other's face, to be replaced by one of animation.

"Oh, yes, I should like to have another look at it myself. I mean to win it, you know."

"I'm sure you're welcome to try," Gail responded pleasantly.

"Oh, I'm not expecting very keen competition this year now that Betty Alden is spending the summer in New York."

Bob and Gail tried not to show their disappointment at this bit of news. With Betty Alden gone, it was true that Margery would be the outstanding contestant in the race.

"I hadn't heard she was leaving," Gail murmured. "I

guess that assures you the trophy, Margery, unless some new champion swimmer comes to town." Impulsively, she turned to Joan. "You'll be eligible to compete, you know."

For the first time since the introduction, Margery bestowed more than a passing glance upon the newcomer.

"You swim?" she questioned.

"A little, but I'm not feeling particularly ambitious."

"I'd not recommend the race for a beginner," Margery said discouragingly. "By the way, Gail, does your aunt keep this locket here on the mantel all the time?"

"Yes. Why do you ask?"

"Aren't you afraid someone might take it?"

"It's been kept here ever since we found it."

"Well, it's your affair," Margery said with a slight shrug, "only I've made up my mind to win the locket and I don't want it to vanish at the last minute."

"It won't."

"All right, but if anything *should* happen to it, I'll feel that I have good reason to protest."

With that, Margery nodded rather indifferently to Joan and moved off to join another group. The three friends carefully avoided a discussion of her actions but it was impossible to conceal their relief that she had taken herself elsewhere. Joan was the first to speak.

"Whatever possessed you, Gail, to mention my name in connection with the race?"

"I couldn't resist teasing Margery. She's so confident of winning the locket that she thinks it's hers already. She looks upon Aunt Ella merely as its custodian and an unsafe one at that."

The orchestra struck up and before Joan could reply, Bob swept her away for the first dance. She waved a farewell to Gail over his shoulder and then forgot all about

the locket under the spell of good music and the expert dancing of her partner.

Joan enjoyed herself to the utmost for Gail and Bob saw to it that she met everyone. Her dance card was well filled to her sorrow on some occasions. She remarked in private to Gail that certain mock pirates must dispatch their victims by stepping all over their poor feet.

The party was well under way when Mrs. Huston who purposely had kept in the background, quietly sought Gail.

"I'm a little disturbed about the refreshments," she explained. "The five gallon freezer of ice cream that I ordered from Hoffman's has failed to come. I wonder if you and Bob could take my motor-boat and go after it?"

"You hold the fort, Aunt Ella, and we'll be back with it in half an hour," Gail promised.

She explained the situation to Bob and Joan. They both were eager to accompany her for they had begun to weary of dancing and the prospect of a cool night ride on the bay sounded alluring. Quietly, the three stole from the inn down to the wharf where *The Minx* was moored. Bob cast off, and with Gail at the wheel they steered toward the town of Crystal Bay.

There was no moon and the few stars which were out provided only faint illumination, but the powerful headlights of *The Minx* pierced the darkness beyond the dipping bow. When Joan turned her eyes from the distant lights of the town, she could imagine that they were plowing straight into the dark wall of the unknown.

"Just the night for pirates to be abroad," Gail laughed as they cut through a wave and the wind blew a thin veil of spray against her cheek. "I could ride like this forever!"

They were drawing near Turkill Isle, and Bob, whose watchful eyes were very keen, suddenly sang out:

"Boat dead ahead!"

The bright headlights of *The Minx* cut through the darkness like a knife, revealing a small row-boat occupied by a lone man. He did not appear to be fishing, but sat in an odd pose, his head resting upon his hands.

Gail swung the wheel slightly, and as they flashed by, Joan and Bob turned to look back.

"I'd give a nickel to know what that fellow thinks about when he sits there hour after hour," the life-guard mused. "He always anchors in nearly the same place and I've never seen him fishing."

"Who is he?" Joan inquired curiously.

Gail answered the question for her but not until they had threaded their way safely through the narrow channel and were in deep water again.

"David Balerton. He's my dramatic teacher. Some folks think he is queer but I like him."

"He attends to his own business and that's more than some folks do," Bob added. "He likes to keep pretty much to himself. He came here two years ago. It piques some folks because they haven't been able to find out a single thing about him."

A few minutes later, *The Minx* eased into the sheltered cove at Crystal Bay. Bob and Gail left Joan in the boat and hurried away to learn what had delayed the delivery of the ice cream. Soon they returned with Bob and another man carrying a five gallon freezer between them. While it was being stowed aboard, Gail explained that there had been a mix-up in regard to the date of the party.

Before the young people had traveled more than half of the distance to Pirate Inn, a gentle rain began to fall. Although visibility grew poor, the shore lights served as markings and Gail was not in the least disturbed. They

traversed the Turkill Isle channel at low speed. After they had passed the island they maintained a close watch for the row-boat which had been anchored, although they did not expect to see it again.

"There he is!" Gail exclaimed in amazement. "Why doesn't the man know it's raining?"

This time they hailed him in passing and he returned their greeting with a wave of the hand.

"Perhaps we should offer to tow him to shore," Gail said doubtfully, looking back over her shoulder. "He looks so cold and wet."

"He likes it that way or he'd row home," Bob consoled her.

They were glad to reach Pirate Inn a few minutes later for the drizzle showed every sign of turning into a real rain. They protected *The Minx* with a canvas cover and then carried the freezer of ice cream up the hill to the Inn where they were greeted by welcome shouts.

With the serving of refreshments, there came only a slight lull in the activity. Joan was too tired to join in the dancing again so she sat with Bob and enjoyed her ice cream and cake. When he excused himself to go after more coffee, she arose and wandered over to the fireplace. This was the first moment that she had had alone during the evening. She found herself thinking of the locket and reflecting upon the circumstance of its discovery.

Impulsively, she lifted the trinket from its case on the mantel and held it to the light. Observing that Gail had detached herself from a group of friends, she motioned for her to come near.

"Gail, did Mrs. Huston ever show this locket to a jeweler?"

"Not to my knowledge. Don't you think it's worth offering as a trophy?"

Joan laughed at the absurdity of such a question.

"On the contrary, I'm inclined to think it may be a very valuable heirloom. I know nothing of jewelry and little of antiques, but this piece looks old and rare to me."

Joan had been turning the trinket over in the palm of her hand. Her finger accidentally pressed against the tiny catch on the rim, and to her astonishment the locket popped open. She stared down at the faded photograph of a young man. The picture was so indistinct that only the main outline of the face could be distinguished, yet it was easy to see that the man had a handsome profile.

"Why, what's this, Gail?"

"Oh, that picture was in the locket when Aunt Ella found it. The catch is very tricky and doesn't open easily. I'll remind Aunt Ella to remove the picture tomorrow."

"But *who* is he?"

"I have no idea. Just a man, I guess."

Joan was not discouraged by the vague response. She studied the face with keen interest, wishing that it were not so blurred.

"Whoever the young man is, he has character," she insisted. "Oh, Gail, doesn't it drive you wild not to know who he is?"

"I never thought that much about it. Maybe he's the brother of the girl who lost the trunk."

This explanation did not satisfy Joan. She shook her head doubtfully.

"Did you ever see a girl who carried her brother's picture around in a locket—unless there was a very special reason for it? Sisters and brothers aren't that sentimental as a rule."

"For that matter, lockets aren't worn much either. They're out of style."

"A locket such as this could never be considered out of date," Joan corrected. "It's far too quaint and beautiful. Gail, the young man in this photograph must have been a very dear friend or perhaps a sweetheart."

"You may be right." Gail did not have her friend's imaginative outlook, but she was sufficiently practical to recognize that Joan's explanation was more likely than her own.

"I wonder if your aunt would let me look at that old trunk sometime?" Joan asked suddenly.

Gail stared in surprise, wondering what had occasioned such enthusiasm. In her opinion, the trunk was devoid of interest, save for the secret compartment in the lid.

"Of course Aunt Ella will let you look at it. But if you're hoping to dig up any new facts about the locket I'm quite certain you'll be disappointed."

"I especially want to look at the diary you mentioned."

"Aunt Ella went through everything. She said the diary was dreadfully dull. Mostly comments about the weather."

"You didn't read it yourself?" Joan inquired in astonishment.

"Oh, I tried but gave it up. The writing was too cramped."

Gail felt that she had exhausted the subject of the locket and turned aside to say good-night to one of the guests who was leaving. Joan continued to stare thoughtfully at the picture of the unknown young man.

A few minutes later, she uttered a low exclamation of amazement which caused Gail to wheel quickly about.

"I—I almost dropped it," Joan laughed nervously. She clasped the locket very tightly in her closed hand.

Gail had not failed to notice the tense expression on

her friend's face, but a certain intuition warned her to refrain from comment. Joan did not return the trophy case to the mantel. Gail guessed that she had something to tell her, and at the first opportunity, she drew near and whispered:

"What happened just then? You look as though you'd discovered something!"

"I think I have," Joan returned in a low tone. "I can't tell you about it now. Wait until the others have gone!"

Chapter III

A BAND OF SILVER

IT SEEMED to Gail that the guests took ages to say their farewells, so eager was she to hear what Joan had to relate. She managed to convey to Bob that something important had come up, and asked him to remain for a few minutes after the others had gone.

"What in the world happened, Joan?" she demanded the instant the three were alone in the empty dining hall. "You look so startled. What did you mean by saying you had made a discovery?"

By this time Joan's excitement had subsided somewhat and she wondered if she had made a great ado over nothing. It was very possible that Gail or Mrs. Huston had made a discovery similar to her own.

"Probably it's no news to either of you," she said, significantly tapping the back of the locket. "But I just learned that this little trinket has a double compartment!"

"What!" Gail exclaimed in amazement. "Why, we never knew that. Are you sure?"

Joan held the open locket before their eyes, dropping the front lid down to reveal the picture of the young man.

"You see how the front lid works. Well, I'm convinced that the back lid drops in the same fashion, only the joining is more cleverly concealed."

She turned the locket upside down and showed them a faint indentation along the rim.

"She's right!" Bob exclaimed, excitement creeping into his voice. "There is another compartment!"

"The hinge is cleverly hidden," Joan pointed out, "and there is no clasp."

"No wonder we never discovered the compartment before," Gail commented. "Can you open it, Joan?"

"I tried but it wouldn't come. Lend me a hair pin and maybe I can get it."

Gail quickly offered one but it was blunt at the end. Joan dug at the rim ineffectively. It stubbornly refused to budge.

"Here, let me try," Bob offered, taking out his knife.

He naturally was inclined to be modest but the occasion brought out the assumed superiority of his sex in the matter of things mechanical. His assurance melted by degrees as he pried at the lid. His best efforts only dulled the blade.

Joan was afraid that the compartment had rusted shut and Gail began to doubt that it had ever been intended to open.

"Yes, it's made to open all right," Bob insisted, unwilling to give up so easily. "Hold on, it's coming now!"

There was a faint grating sound as the lid loosened, popping open suddenly like a tiny jack-in-the-box.

"Well did you ever!" Gail murmured in awe, and Joan herself stood speechless at what she saw.

There in the tiny gold compartment, lay a ring, unique, beautiful, unlike anything they had ever seen before. It consisted of several thin strands of silver interwound in such intricate fashion that there appeared to be no beginning nor end. Even more strange was a tiny ornament in the shape of an outstretched hand.

"It's the loveliest thing I've ever seen!" Joan exclaimed, her eyes ablaze with excitement.

"And to think it's been in the locket all this time and

"I never discovered it," Gail cried. "Joan, when it comes to finding things, you're a marvel!"

"This was mostly accident," Joan returned modestly. "Still, I should have thought someone would have heard the ring rattling around inside the locket."

"It fits the compartment too tightly for that," Bob returned.

Almost reverently, he lifted the silver ring from its hiding place. Holding it between thumb and forefinger, he raised it to the electric light where they could examine it closely.

"Do you suppose that ornament has any special significance?" Joan questioned, indicating the outstretched hand.

"I've never seen its like on any other ring," Gail returned thoughtfully. "Perhaps it's an insignia of some fraternal order."

The girls were fairly aching to take the ring from Bob, and now, unable to resist the temptation to try it on her finger, Gail asked him for it. Bob had not meant to tantalize them, and readily gave it up. Gail tried the ring on several fingers but it was too small. She handed it to Joan, who unable to resist a similar feminine impulse, slipped it over her third finger.

"A perfect fit," she laughed. "One would almost think it had been made for me."

She held up her hand admiringly for the others to see, then removed the ring. In doing so, her attention was drawn to an inscription engraved in tiny letters on the inside surface of the ornament. Eagerly, the others peered at it, but the wording was too fine for them to read.

"I'll get a magnifying glass," Gail declared. "There's one in Aunt Ella's desk."

She hurried away, returning in an incredibly short time

with the round glass. Joan held it over the ring and was gratified to see that the lettering was increased several times in size.

"*'Quod Deus conjunxit,'*" she read slowly, spelling out each letter. "What can that mean?"

"Why, it's Latin," Gail declared instantly. "I know because I studied it for two long, horrible years."

The others urged her to tell them the meaning of the inscription. Gail's brows knitted as she studied the words through the magnifying glass, but after a moment she shook her head regretfully.

"I'm ashamed to say I've forgotten all the Latin I ever knew. Didn't you study it, Bob?"

He made a negative gesture.

"Can't you make any of it out, Gail?" Joan asked hopefully. "Try!"

"Only one word and that isn't much help."

"One word is better than nothing at all. What is it?"

"What!"

"What?" Joan repeated, mystified.

"That's it," Gail giggled. "'What' is the word I can decipher. It's the first word in the inscription."

"Now a lot of good that's going to do us," Bob growled.

"I told you it wouldn't help. I can look up the rest in my Latin book."

"I wish you would," Joan said thoughtfully. "It might prove interesting to know. Of course, the inscription may be of no importance, but on the other hand, it's possible we've stumbled upon a real mystery."

"I love to read about them," Gail remarked enthusiastically, "but I never thought one would stop at my doorstep."

"I suspect this one has been hiding in that storeroom of yours for a good many years," Joan laughed. "Wouldn't it be fun to dig it out?"

Gail's eyes brightened at the thought but as she realized that the only approach to the so-called mystery must come through the reviewing of information which long had been at hand, her face clouded.

"Even if we have stumbled into a mystery, I don't see what we can do about it," she responded doubtfully. "Where could we begin?"

"That's easy," Bob laughed, secretly a little amused at the enthusiasm of his companions. "Why not begin with the inscription and appoint you as a committee of one to track it down?"

"And we'll both help you all we can," Joan nodded approvingly. "Another thing, we must find that diary. It may prove to be the very core of the mystery."

"I'm sure I can get it," Gail promised. "It may be that Aunt Ella didn't read everything in it carefully. Of course, she never dreamed the locket contained anything of value. Shall I tell her about the ring?"

This was a question which required discussion. Joan was of the opinion that it would not be right to allow Mrs. Huston to offer the locket as a racing trophy without informing her of its contents, but on the other hand, to take adults into the secret would be to spoil half the fun. Bob set Joan's mind at rest by pointing out that it would be many weeks before the race would be held and by that time the mystery might be solved.

"Let's keep it to ourselves for a while at least," Gail pleaded. "We can tell Aunt Ella in ample time and she'll still be free to offer another trophy in place of the locket if she wishes."

"That seems fair," Joan agreed. "And now, what shall we do with the ring?"

"Why not leave it exactly where we found it?" Gail suggested. "Since it's been safe in the locket for so long, there's not much danger of anyone finding it very soon."

The discussion was interrupted just then by the sound of approaching footsteps. The three scarcely knew what to do. Joan, thinking quickly, hastily placed the ring in the secret compartment of the locket. The lid snapped down as snugly as before.

No sooner had she returned the leather case to the mantel than Mrs. Huston came into the dining room. She looked quickly from one to the other, for although they had composed their faces, the very innocence of their expressions, convinced her that they had some secret. However, to their relief she merely inquired if the evening had been a pleasant one.

"It was the most exciting party I ever attended," Joan declared, directing a significant glance at her companions.

As the hour was late, Bob said good-night and departed. Alone with the girls, Mrs. Huston surveyed the room and sighed. It was littered with colored papers and all sorts of débris, thoughtlessly scattered by the merry-makers. She moved about locking the doors.

"I'll help you straighten up in the morning," Gail promised. "By the way, do you think it's safe to leave the locket here in the dining room?"

Mrs. Huston regarded her with surprise, wondering at Gail's sudden interest in the trinket.

"Why, who would take it? I've always kept it here."

"I know, only Joan thought it might be more valuable than we think. She's interested in the diary that came with it. Do you still have it, Aunt Ella?"

"Yes, it's in that old trunk in the storeroom. I left everything practically as I found it. You're welcome to search all you like, Joan, but I fear you'll not find the diary very interesting."

Joan was aroused early the next morning by the roar of an automobile engine directly under the bedroom window. She stirred drowsily and through sleep-drugged eyes saw Gail peering through the curtains down into the yard.

"The very idea of waking a person at this hour!" she protested to Joan. "It's only Jake Closson. He's come in his old flivver to get Sadie and her luggage."

"And who is Sadie?" Joan mumbled sleepily.

"One of our waitresses. She's going on a vacation somewhere. A pity she couldn't start at a respectable hour!"

Gail sprang back into bed, curled up in a little ball, and was soon sleeping soundly. Joan did not mean to drop off again, but when next she opened her eyes, Gail was shaking her vigorously.

"Get up, sleepy head! It's going on ten o'clock."

"Ten! Mercy, what will your aunt think!" Joan bounded to the floor, gazing in disbelief at the little ivory clock on the dresser.

"Oh, Aunt Ella always expects folks to sleep late after parties," Gail reassured her.

They hurriedly dressed and foraged their own breakfast in the kitchen. After they had spent a few minutes teasing the cook, they sought Mrs. Huston who was gathering flowers in the garden for the dining room tables, and from her secured the key to the storeroom.

Their spirits were high as they raced up the stairs for even Gail had begun to believe that the diary might yield a clue as to the owner of the mysterious locket and ring.

She unlocked the storeroom door and they entered. Joan switched on the electric light and her eyes went directly to the place where she had seen the little trunk the previous evening.

"Why, it's gone!" she cried in astonishment.

"It must be here somewhere," Gail insisted.

In bewilderment she gazed about the cluttered little room. She could not imagine what had become of the old sea trunk. It had always been kept in the storeroom and she, too, recalled seeing it the previous evening. For years it had stood in the same place near the window with a rag rug thrown over it to afford protection from dust. The rug now lay crumpled upon the floor, a vacant rectangle marking the place where the trunk had been.

"I'm sure it was here when we came for your masquerade outfit, Joan. I remember you mentioned it."

"Yes, I did. I suppose it's been moved."

"Well, the trunk must be here somewhere," Joan said with conviction. "It couldn't have sprouted legs and walked away very well."

Gail was familiar with every article in the storeroom and her first careful inspection had assured her that the trunk was not there. But what had become of it? She knew that the storeroom had been kept locked, and her aunt had not mentioned moving the trunk. Mrs. Huston had given them the key, knowing that they were going to the storeroom to search for the diary.

"This certainly is baffling," she pondered with a perplexed frown. "We'll ask Aunt Ella about it."

They found her in the dining hall where she had just finished arranging bouquets of cut flowers in several vases and bowls. She smiled indulgently as they told her of their unsuccessful search of the storeroom, for she was

well acquainted with Gail's habit of overlooking objects which were directly under her eyes.

"The trunk must be there," she told them. "Possibly it has been pushed back out of sight. You looked carefully?"

They assured her again that they had. Now that Mrs. Huston made it clear that she knew nothing about the trunk's disappearance, they were more than half convinced someone had stolen it. When Gail expressed such an opinion, Mrs. Huston laughingly refused to take stock in it.

"The trunk probably is the least valuable thing in the house, Gail," she said, gathering up a few clipped stems and broken flowers which had dropped to the floor. "I'm sure no one would want it. I'll go with you and see if I can't locate it."

The girls conducted her to the storeroom, and somewhat triumphantly pointed to the vacant spot where the trunk had stood.

"You see, it's gone," Gail declared. "We did hunt carefully."

Mrs. Huston looked perplexed until her gaze came to rest upon her own steamer trunk. Her voice rippled with gay laughter.

The girls could see nothing humorous in the situation. Joan felt that all their hope of solving the ring mystery centered in the old sea trunk while Gail's interest had been stimulated greatly by learning that the object of their search was missing. If the trunk could not be located all their fine plans might come to an abrupt end.

"Aunt Ella, what are you chuckling about?" Gail demanded.

"I am afraid that quite unwittingly I gave the trunk away."

"You gave it away?" Gail echoed plaintively and Joan's face grew long. "That doesn't seem very funny to me."

Mrs. Huston quickly composed her face as she realized that the recovery of the trunk meant a great deal to the girls.

"You see, it happened this way. Last week Sadie who has worked for me over a year without a vacation asked if she could have a month off to visit her sister in Michigan. I granted the leave of absence and when she told me that she had no trunk I gave her permission to use mine."

"You gave Sadie the old sea chest?" Gail groaned. "Oh, Aunt Ella!"

"Not intentionally. She must have taken it by mistake. I intended that she should use my trunk. They look somewhat alike except that the one she took was badly battered and water-soaked. A young friend of hers came for the trunk early this morning. I was busy at the time, so instead of coming up here with them as I should have done, I gave Sadie the key and told her to get the trunk. I didn't see them when they left with it."

"I saw Jake Closson drive up in his flivver," Gail said despondently, "but I was too sleepy to pay much attention. Oh, dear, if only I'd had my wits about me I could have stopped him."

"The trunk will be returned safely," Mrs. Huston replied comfortingly. "Sadie takes very good care of things. She's so conscientious, I suppose she thought she ought not to take the new trunk."

The prospect of a month's wait filled Gail and Joan with gloom. Before Sadie returned to Pirate Inn, Joan's visit would be nearing its end, and without the trunk, the mystery doubtless would remain at a standstill.

"Oh, I don't see how Sadie could be so stupid!" Gail

exclaimed impatiently. "What will become of all the dresses and things in the trunk? Especially the diary that was hidden in the lid? It's just too disappointing."

Mrs. Huston had not considered this angle. However, if Joan and Gail wished to revive the old story, and add glamorous, imaginary details of their own making, she saw no harm in it. Their venture might end unsuccessfully, yet it would provide a means of occupying spare time.

"It may not be too late to get the trunk back before Sadie leaves on her trip," she said decisively, and was rewarded by seeing Joan and Gail instantly brighten. "After all, I don't care to have her running off with the diary, for who knows—some day the owner might return to claim her possessions."

Gail and Joan positively beamed at this. They besieged Mrs. Huston with questions. When was Sadie leaving on her trip? Where did she live?

"She planned to leave either today or tomorrow. I can't remember which she said. I'll see if I can reach her on the telephone."

The girls hovered near as Mrs. Huston searched the directory for Sadie's number. It could not be located and they were forced to the conclusion that no telephone was listed under her name. Gail and Joan suggested that they drive to the rooming house where Sadie lived. Mrs. Huston found the address for them, offering the use of her car.

In the automobile, speeding toward the outlying district, the girls gave vent to their feelings and fears.

"Something tells me we'll be too late to save the trunk," Gail fretted, scowling darkly at a red traffic light which held them up for several minutes. "You'd think that when Sadie saw the dresses and things inside, she'd realize she'd

made a mistake. Sadie always was a little slow about catching on to things, though she's a marvelous worker."

Precious minutes were lost when they experienced difficulty in locating the address Mrs. Huston had given them. But at length they rang the doorbell of the boarding house and inquired for the waitress. The red-faced woman who had answered their call stared at them somewhat rudely.

"Sure, Sadie Perkins lives here," she informed bluntly, "but I doubt if she'll be wantin' to see any visitors now. Her trunk's already been sent to the depot and she'll be leavin' herself any minute now. Sadie's visitin' some relatives in Michigan, but if she stops to talk with anyone she'll miss her train."

"Her trunk has been sent to the station?" Gail echoed in a discouraged tone. "Was it a small steamer trunk, considerably battered and worn?"

"That's it," the landlady informed them.

Gail and Joan exchanged a glance which acknowledged defeat.

"I guess there's nothing left to do except go in and wish her a pleasant trip," Gail said gloomily.

Joan nodded an unhappy agreement. Disregarding the pointed hint that no visitors were desired at such a late hour, they marched past the landlady and listlessly climbed the long flight of creaking stairs which led to Sadie's room.

THE MISSING TRUNK

AT LEAST, we may be able to learn what Sadie did with the dresses that were in the trunk," Joan remarked, as they knocked lightly on the bedroom door.

They heard a flutter of footsteps and a minute later the door was opened, but before the girls could explain their mission, the waitress clutched Gail by the arm.

"Oh, I'm in a peck o' trouble," she wailed. "My train leaves in less than an hour and I've lost my ticket! What shall I do?"

Sadie's hat had been pushed back at a ridiculous angle. Her coat which she had dropped upon the bed, lay in a crumpled heap. The room looked as if a hurricane had swept through it.

"Where did you have it last?" Gail asked, as she reached down to straighten the wrinkled coat.

"If I knew that, I wouldn't be looking for it," Sadie moaned, dropping into a chair. "Oh, I've saved for this trip more than a year, and now I can't go."

Joan and Gail soothed the distraught waitress and set about searching the room in systematic fashion. In her frantic attempt to find the missing ticket, Sadie had unpacked her suitcase, scattering the contents everywhere.

"Perhaps you locked it up in your trunk," Joan suggested, as she went about repacking the suitcase.

"No, it couldn't be there," Sadie grieved. "I had the ticket not an hour ago—after my trunk went to the station."

"Have you looked in your pocketbook?" Joan asked when they were at their wits' end.

Sadie insisted that she had, several times, and with a vision of her long cherished vacation slipping from her, dissolved into tears.

"Let me look," Joan urged and as the waitress handed over the purse, carefully sorted out a miscellaneous collection of papers, letters, and various articles. As she unfolded a letter, a long yellow slip of paper fluttered to the floor.

"What's this?" she demanded.

With a cry of joy, Sadie pounced upon the scrap of paper like a cat upon its prey.

"Oh! Oh! It's my ticket! And I looked in that pocket-book at least a dozen times!"

Fairly hugging the girls in her delight, Sadie adjusted her hat and caught up her gloves. She cast an anxious glance at the clock.

"I must hurry now or I'll miss my train."

"You still have a half hour," Gail pointed out, "and we'll drive you to the station."

For the first time, it dawned upon the waitress that the girls must have had some special purpose in visiting her. In response to her question they explained about the mixup in trunks. Sadie was thrown into further confusion.

"Oh, good gracious, whatever shall I do?" It's too late to get another trunk now."

"You'll just have to take it, I guess," Gail told her resignedly. "What did you do with the things that were inside?"

Sadie flung wide the closet door, exposing a cardboard box into which various garments had been carefully packed.

"I didn't know there was anything in the trunk until I opened it here in my room," she explained contritely. "What will Mrs. Huston think of me?"

Gail reassured her on that point and dragged forth the box. She felt confident that the diary was not there but to make certain she ran her hand down between the folds of the garments.

"Is anything gone?" Sadie questioned in alarm.

Gail made an evasive answer. The diary was not in the box, but it would never do to tell Sadie where it was, for the waitress was inclined to be prying. If only she and Joan could think of some excuse for opening the trunk at the station! Time was growing short. Now that Sadie's ticket had been located Gail could find no reason for asking permission to dig into the trunk.

"We may as well be starting for the train," she said morosely, picking up the cardboard box to carry it to the car.

Sadie chattered excitedly during the brief ride to the station. She was to occupy a Pullman for the first time in her life, but having been warned by friends that prices in the diner were high, carried her own box of lunch. She besieged the girls with questions, asking them how one managed to climb into an upper berth and if there were any danger of falling out when the train swerved around a sharp bend.

"Don't fret about it, Sadie," Gail advised kindly as they drove up to the station. "It really doesn't matter greatly—at least not to Aunt Ella. It's just that the trunk isn't hers—it belonged to some passenger that was lost on *The Breneman*."

Sadie had heard the story of how the trunk was found, and looked disturbed. She was inclined to be slightly superstitious.

"It may bring me bad luck to use the trunk," she declared uneasily. "But I guess there's no way out of it now."

Gail unloaded the suitcase from the back seat and prepared to follow the waitress into the station. Joan clutched her arm, pulling her back. She indicated a second-hand store directly across the street. Gail did not comprehend her friend's meaning until she noticed several suitcases and a small trunk which stood just outside the door. A price card printed in bold letters proclaimed the bargain sale price of five dollars and ninety-eight cents. Both girls were inspired with the same thought, but immediately the drawbacks to their unexpressed plan were apparent.

"We can't afford to buy Sadie a trunk even if we had time to make the exchange," Gail pointed out. "Anyway, I came off without my pocketbook."

Joan drew out her own purse. Counting her money she found that she had five dollars and fifteen cents.

"I guess it is impossible," she agreed reluctantly, "because I haven't quite enough to pay for it."

Gail surveyed the second-hand store with a speculative eye. She knew the district well and suspected that the owner might be induced to accept slightly less than the advertised price of the trunk.

"I imagine we could get it for five dollars, Joan. But I'm unwilling to allow you to spend your money. Besides, is the diary worth it?"

Gail had viewed the little journal any number of times. She was more than half convinced that a second reading of it would throw no new light on the ring mystery.

Joan fingered her money thoughtfully. Five dollars would buy so many nice things. It did seem foolish to buy a second-hand trunk for Sadie, yet there seemed no other way to get the old sea chest back.

"I think the most sensible thing to do is to tell Sadie why we have to get into that trunk," Gail said decisively. "She's a dreadful gossip though. All the employes at Pirate Inn will hear about it as soon as she's had time to write a letter back."

"Even if we do secure the diary, we won't have the trunk. Possibly we might find some clue in it that was overlooked before."

"That's so, but I'm not going to let you spend your money—"

"Nonsense," Joan interrupted with a laugh as she half dragged her friend across the street. "My allowance is twice what it is when I'm at home. We'll have to work fast because it's almost train time now."

With an attempt at carelessness, they paused before the second-hand store to inspect the trunk. It was a better one than they had thought.

"Maybe it will do no good to offer the man only five dollars," Joan said doubtfully.

"Leave it to me," Gail returned confidently.

They entered the store and the proprietor, a small, energetic man emerged from behind the counter, smiling blandly.

"And what could I do for you, Misses? A nice watch, a diamond, a bracelet, maybe?"

"Oh, no," replied Gail, taking the initiative, "we are interested in a trunk."

"So! If the young ladies will follow me to my store-room, I show them exquisite trunks—for every little part of the wardrobe. Yes!"

"We're not interested in any expensive wardrobe trunks. This one you have on the sidewalk will serve very well."

"But if you are traveling how nice to have a place for your dresses, your hats, your shoes, your—"

"We are not traveling," Gail broke in impatiently. "We want this trunk for a friend who hasn't much money to spend."

Somewhat crestfallen as the prospect of a sizable sale dissolved, the shopkeeper led the way to the sidewalk. Once there, however, his sales fervor revived.

"It is a marvelous trunk, ladies. You see it is made of the best fibre with metal corners. Here is a hat and dress tray and here is—"

"Yes, yes, we see," Gail interrupted. "One hinge is a little loose and there's a long, ugly scratch across the top. How much allowance will you make us for that?"

"W-e-ll," the shopkeeper eyed Gail shrewdly, trying to estimate how much she would pay. "To you I make a special price. Five-fifty."

"Four seventy-five," Gail countered briskly.

The shopkeeper threw up his hands at the very thought of such a ridiculous price.

"Never can I let such a fine trunk as this go for four seventy-five. I must have five-fifty."

The girls would have paid the price but they did not have it. Gail knew of only one means of bringing the shopkeeper to terms and that was to turn away with the remark that they would look elsewhere for a trunk.

The man watched them leave, but before they had gone a dozen steps he came running after them.

"To you I make it five dollars, but that is my very lowest price."

"Done," Gail breathed in relief, "but upon one provision. You must wipe it out clean and have it at the baggage room of the station within ten minutes."

"But that is impossible, Miss!"

Joan drew a crisp bill from her purse and dangled it before his eyes.

"This will be waiting for you at the depot if you get there within ten minutes."

The girls felt a trifle foolish as they walked across the street to find Sadie. They were confident that the trunk would be delivered, but if the waitress balked at making the change, their plan must fail.

She offered far more opposition than they anticipated, protesting that there was not sufficient time to change the trunks and that she did not care to have her possessions strewn all over the baggage room.

"I spent three hours packing that trunk," she argued. "If all my clothes are mussed up, I might just as well stay home."

In the end, the eloquence of the girls won her over. Reluctantly, she gave them her claim check. When the three reached the baggage room they saw the shopkeeper coming across the street with the newly purchased trunk on his shoulder.

"It's a much nicer trunk," Joan cheered Sadie, "and it's your very own. Gail and I are giving it to you."

Sadie softened at such generosity but as the girls enthusiastically set about the task of removing her possessions from the old steamer trunk, she eyed them a trifle skeptically.

"What's got into you that you want this trunk back so badly?" she demanded of Gail. "And you paid five dollars for it too."

"Never look a gift horse in the mouth," Gail returned serenely as she went on packing.

The baggageman came over to view the interesting spectacle, greatly to the embarrassment of poor Sadie who could not bear to have her garments exposed to the

gaze of strangers. She was quite beside herself when a shrill whistle far down the track warned that the train was coming. Gail crammed the last article into the trunk and slammed down the lid.

The baggageman, who by this time had taken a personal interest in Sadie's unceremonious departure, obligingly checked the piece of luggage. While Gail led the flustered waitress to the train, Joan remained behind to make certain that the trunk was loaded on the wagon and wheeled to the baggage car. She rejoined Gail just as the train pulled out, tossing the claim check through the open window into Sadie's lap.

"Never as long as I live will I take another trip!" the waitress called shrilly. Joan and Gail ran alongside the moving train that they might hear her final condemnation. "Two such madcaps I never did see!"

"I think we are a little insane," Gail laughed as they leaned against the station house to catch their breath.

"Well, we have the trunk—and, I hope the diary," Joan chuckled. "Perhaps we acted impulsively, but I like to do things that way."

After they had rested a few minutes they returned to the baggage room and were faced with the problem of getting the empty trunk to their car which was parked close by. Joan rummaged in her purse and found fifteen cents which was all that remained of her weekly allowance. They located a negro boy who was sleeping in the shade of the station platform and for the small tip he was very glad to carry the trunk to the automobile.

Gail did not feel right about her friend having spent so much of her money. She insisted that she would repay her when they reached Pirate Inn and after some discussion and considerable remonstrance on Joan's part, it

was agreed that they should divide the expense between them

At Pirate Inn, they carried the trunk up the little knoll, depositing it triumphantly before Mrs. Huston who was seated on the veranda.

"You'll never know what we went through to get it back, Aunt Ella," Gail sighed. "I'm too exhausted to tell the story now but you'll hear it in due time."

Having regained their breath, they carried the trunk into the house, placing it in their own bedroom. Gail returned to the automobile for the box of dresses they had brought from Sadie's rooming house.

"And now for the diary!" Joan exclaimed, lifting the lid of the trunk. "Show me how the secret spring works."

Gail ran her hand across the under edge of the lid until she came to a studded nail. She pressed upon it. The lid instantly dropped down, revealing a flat, vacant cavity. Gail thrust in her hand and drew forth a small journal. She handed the diary to Joan.

It was made of excellent leather but had been damaged by careless handling. Joan slowly turned the pages, noting that many were torn or badly stained. It would be more difficult than she had imagined to distinguish the words which were written in a fine, cramped hand.

"Well, that's what your five dollars bought," Gail commented dryly. "You'll be a wizard if you can decipher it."

"It doesn't look easy, I'll admit, but perhaps together we can make something of it."

"The girl who lost this trunk must have gone in for hand made dresses or else she deliberately removed all the markings," Joan mused. "She must have been about our height and size."

Gail held one of the dresses against her body, prancing a few steps.

"Can't you picture me in this? The good old-fashioned girl."

"Your dresses will look just as out-dated five years from now. And all joking aside, that's a fine looking gown. I imagine the girl came from a well-to-do family."

"This dress is made of rich material," Gail acknowledged, feeling of the texture.

Joan, sitting back on her heels, surveyed her companion meditatively.

"Gail, you were telling me about *The Breneman*. For what port was it bound at the time of the wreck?"

"Miami, I think. It was a Bermuda boat, carrying mostly cargo and only a few passengers."

"Then it's likely that the girl came from there. She may have been English."

"She might have been an American though. A great many persons from the States visit there."

Joan relapsed into a thoughtful silence which she presently ended by saying:

"Has it ever occurred to you that there may be a tragic story back of that ring we found? There's something about it all—the picture in the locket and the peculiar way this trunk was left aboard the ship after the wreck—that gets me! I can't explain it."

"I know. I feel the same way. I'll keep thinking about that girl until we find out what became of her."

Gail then proposed that they try to decipher the Latin inscription which they had noted the previous evening on the silver ring. She recalled that many of her school books had been stored in a box in the closet, so they rummaged through them. Not until they were covered

with dirt and had examined every book in the closet, would Gail admit defeat.

"Come to think of it, I guess Aunt Ella gave all my Latin books away," she admitted sheepishly.

"You're a little late in remembering," Joan laughed. "Well, let's get a little of this dirt off our hands."

"I'm terribly sorry we went to so much bother. But we can get a Latin grammar at the public library. Shall we go there as soon as we've cleaned up?"

"All right," Joan agreed, a trifle hesitatingly.

She had planned to spend the remainder of the day poring over the diary, but it would keep. After all, in attempting to solve the mystery, it was logical that they should begin with the inscription.

Regretfully, she tucked the diary away in an upper bureau drawer and for the time being forgot it.

THE LATIN INSCRIPTION

UNDAUNTED by a scorching mid-afternoon heat which kept sensible adults in the shade, the girls made their way through deserted streets to the public library. Gail led Joan to the foreign language room, where with the aid of a helpful librarian, they located a Latin grammar and a dictionary which gave promise of revealing what they wished to learn. Carrying the books to a desk near the window, they diligently applied themselves to the task of translating the strange inscription on the silver ring.

"I'll not be the least bit of help," Joan declared regretfully. "One word looks much the same as another to me. If you don't mind, I'll walk around and examine some of the other books. Signal me if you find anything interesting."

Gail nodded absently for already she was absorbed in her task. Fifteen minutes elapsed before she glanced up from her work. Joan had vanished from the room.

"Now where did she go?" Gail asked herself. "Just when I have it!"

Carefully, she copied the translation and closed the dictionary. At that moment Joan came hurrying in at the door, and her face was so animated that Gail did not have the heart to chide her for going away.

"I went into the Fine Arts room adjoining," Joan explained, a trifle breathlessly. "I found the most interesting book—"

"I believe you've forgotten all about the inscription," Gail said accusingly.

"Quite the contrary. I didn't mean to run off only I thought I was bothering you. Did you get the translation?"

"Yes, I did. The first translation didn't seem to make sense so I checked it with the dictionary to be sure I had it right."

"What did you find? Tell me!"

"Not here," Gail returned, aware that the librarian had turned a disapproving stare upon them. "Let's go outside where we can really talk."

The instant they were outside the library, she produced a sheet of paper upon which the scribbled translation appeared. Studying it eagerly, Joan saw that Gail had written down the Latin inscription, "*Quod Deus conjunxit*," and opposite it, her translation, "What God hath joined together—"

"But this can't be all of it," Joan commented, frowning slightly. "Where's the last part of the quotation?"

"There isn't any. That was all that appeared on the ring."

"But surely you recall the quotation," Joan reminded. "'What God hath joined together let not man put asunder.'"

"Yes, but only half of the quotation appears on the ring," Gail insisted. "That's queer, isn't it? Why does the quotation break off in the middle?"

"Why, indeed?" Joan echoed, staring thoughtfully at the paper which she still held.

"Possibly part of the inscription wore off the ring."

"That doesn't sound reasonable to me, Gail. I'd quicker think it had been removed—if ever it were there in the first place."

"We can soon find out by looking at the ring again," Gail proposed. "Let's go back to the Inn and examine it under the magnifying glass."

In their eagerness to reach Pirate Inn, they fairly flew down the street.

Joan snatched the locket from its case on the mantel and with the aid of a nail file opened the secret compartment which was not as stubborn as before. Removing the ring, she held it under the magnifying glass. It was clear to both girls that there was insufficient space on the inner surface of the ornament for an inscription longer than the one which appeared. Joan ran an exploratory finger over the engraved letters.

"I'm sure the words have never been altered," she declared. "No, it's evident that only this first half of the quotation was ever used. Now I wonder why—"

Footsteps in the outside hall warned the girls that someone was approaching. They replaced the ring in the locket and returned it to the shelf. Then, trying not to disclose that they were in the least excited, they sauntered from the room, well aware that the new waitress who was taking Sadie's place, eyed them suspiciously.

"She suspects we've been up to mischief," Gail laughed. "We were too quick for her that time though."

The girls were eager for a pretext to tell Bob what they had learned concerning the Latin inscription, and since it was only five o'clock, decided they would have ample time for a swim before the dinner hour. Slinging their bathing suits over their arms, they raced down the path to the beach.

They met Bob emerging from the bath house in street clothing, but upon hearing that they had something interesting to report, he said that he was in no hurry to

go home. The three sought a secluded place on the beach, and Gail related their various adventures.

"From your translation of the inscription, I'd say it was used on a wedding ring," Bob remarked when Gail had finished her story. "But it is sort of funny that only half of the quotation was used."

"I thought the inscription might explain things," Joan said regretfully, "but our translation only makes it more baffling."

"I don't see how we're going to get any further with the mystery," Gail observed pessimistically.

Joan reminded her that the diary remained to be investigated.

"We can't pin much hope to it. Aunt Ella read the diary and I glanced over it myself. Of course, I'll admit we didn't go over it minutely."

Joan smiled mysteriously as she said: "Well, I'm not depending too much upon it. I may have a few more ideas later."

Pressed for an explanation, she laughingly shook her head. "I can't say much about it just yet because my idea isn't really definite enough to state in words. The minute I have something tangible, I'll tell you both."

Bob and Gail regarded their companion curiously. They did not see how she could have learned anything they had overlooked, but of one thing they were certain. In the brief time that Joan had been in Crystal Bay she had succeeded in stirring up more excitement than they had known in many a year.

So much time had been devoted to the discussion that it was too late for a swim. Joan and Gail did not mind. They said good-bye to Bob and with their bathing suits still dry hurried back to the Inn for dinner.

"This is my night for play rehearsal," Gail lamented

a little later, at the dinner table. "Our dramatic club is giving 'The Merchant of Venice'. I'd cut practice only Mr. Balerton is very strict about it."

"Is he coaching the play?" Joan inquired with interest. "You mean the man we saw in the boat near Turkill Isle."

"Yes, Mr. Balerton is real nice when you get to know him." Gail spoke warmly for she was a little afraid that her friend might have gained an erroneous impression of the coach.

"I'd like to go with you and watch the rehearsal if visitors are permitted, Gail."

"I'd not ask such a sacrifice of an enemy, much less a friend. The rehearsals are going very, very badly. You'll probably have to see the play when we give it, so in all fairness I shouldn't inflict it upon you beforehand."

Joan did not urge the matter for while she was interested in the young dramatic coach she was more interested in a certain book she had noticed that afternoon at the library. When Gail offered profuse apologies for deserting her, she explained her desire to spend the evening reading.

"If I get tired browsing I may drop in for you after rehearsals," she suggested.

"We're practicing at the school auditorium just a block north from the library. If you do stop for me I'll see to it that you get to meet Mr. Balerton. He's frightfully good looking, but a little girl shy. At least he never seems to notice anyone."

"No chance for me then," Joan sighed with pretended regret.

After dinner the girls walked together to the school auditorium, and then Joan went on alone to the library. She made her way directly to the Fine Arts division,

promptly becoming engrossed in the book which she had noticed earlier in the day. So absorbed was she in its contents that she took no notice of passing time until the librarian blinked the lights to warn of the closing hour.

Hastily, she gathered her notes and departed. Fearing that Gail might be waiting for her, she ran the greater part of the way to the high school building. Rehearsals were still in progress she discovered to her relief.

She slipped quietly into the auditorium, intending to find a seat somewhere near the rear. But Gail who was standing near the stage, sighted her instantly and signalled for her to come up front.

"There's only one more scene to rehearse and then I can go," she told Joan wearily. Then dropping her voice to a whisper: "Oh, here's our coach, Mr. Balerton—I want you to meet him."

Joan found herself with a tall, well-dressed man who appeared to be in his early thirties. His voice was friendly and agreeable as he acknowledged the introduction but she could not help but notice a certain undercurrent of restraint in his manner.

"He's like that with everyone," Gail explained a minute later after Mr. Balerton had gone back to the stage. "He doesn't mean to be rude—he's just aloof."

"His face is so serious for a young man," Joan mused. "And there's something elusive about him too—it suggests some dark, deep, heart-breaking secret. Has he been disappointed in love?"

"Not so far as anyone knows. But then he never encouraged folks to question his past. I guess his reticence is natural only it piques everyone's interest."

"He resembles someone I've seen before," Joan mused thoughtfully. "Has he always had that mustache?"

Gail laughed outright.

"How should I know? You're the limit! I do believe you mean to tie the poor man down to some past crime."

"I do not! Such a thing never entered my mind." Quickly, Joan switched to a safer subject. "Tell me something about 'The Merchant of Venice.' All I can recall is the part about the three caskets and Shylock's pound of flesh."

"That's about all I remember too," Gail declared, reaching guiltily for her play book. "I'm Portia and you recollect that I dressed up as a lawyer and helped Bassanio free his friend from Shylock. In payment, not being aware of my identity, Bassanio gave me a ring which he had sworn always to keep. Nerissa, my companion, had given a similar ring to Gratiano. Now this last scene is supposed to be a sort of back-handed 'welcome your husband home' act."

She broke off as Mr. Balerton called to say they were ready to rehearse. After Gail had hurried back-stage, Joan seated herself near the front of the auditorium.

In truth, she found herself more interested in Mr. Balerton than in the play, for the scene went badly and many of the characters stumbled over their lines. She was impressed by the quiet yet efficient way the young man directed.

Joan's attention wandered, only to come back to the stage as she heard Gail say in a vigorous voice: "'A quarrel, ho, already! What's the matter?'"

The next passage dealt with the ring, and since rings had become a vital interest in Joan's life, she listened to every word.

Gratiano, a pale youth with a listless, sing-song voice, responded like a phonograph which was slowly running down:

"'About a hoop of gold, a paltry ring
That she did give to me; whose posy was
For all the world like cutler's poetry
Upon a knife, *Love me and leave me not.*'"

Nerissa was plunging bravely into her speech: "'What talk you of the posy or the value?'" when Mr. Balerton stopped her.

"I'm sure you don't really understand the meaning of your lines or you'd speak them with more feeling," he said to the crestfallen Gratiano. "Do you know what is meant by a posy on a ring?"

Joan leaned forward that she might not miss a single word.

"A posy is a flowery, sentimental saying which during Shakespeare's time frequently was engraved on rings," the dramatic coach explained. "In the case of this particular ring, the posy is, 'Love me and leave me not.' Often such rings were exchanged by betrothed couples, and posies were used on wedding rings as well." Mr. Balerton hesitated, finishing in a slightly altered voice: "The story of old rings—their histories—the tragedies connected with them, is a subject in itself. But we'll go on."

The scene continued. For some reason Mr. Balerton became less alert. He sat listlessly in his chair as if only half aware of what his charges were saying. Several times when a player forgot, his eyes were not even on the play book. He made no further corrections and appeared relieved when the last lines were spoken.

"Well, it's over for another night," Gail declared with a tired sigh as she rejoined her friend. "Let's get away from here as quickly as we can. Did our acting seem dreadful to you?"

Joan offered the expected compliments and added earnestly:

"I was tremendously interested in what Mr. Balerton said about rings. And did you notice the strange way he acted when he spoke of their histories—and what else did he say? Oh yes, their *tragedies*."

"Oh, you mustn't attach any significance to his actions."

"But he was telling about the posy on rings," Joan persisted, "and only tonight I was reading about the same thing at the library."

Gail was tired. The rehearsal had gone very badly and she longed to forget rings and everything connected with the play. She failed to notice that Joan was a trifle excited and eager to impart information.

"Joan, I'm too sleepy to care whether rings had posies or not," she declared. "I'll be so glad when these stupid rehearsals are over."

Joan started to reply, then abruptly changed her mind. She slipped her arm through Gail's, giving it a sympathetic squeeze.

"I know you must be dead," she said quietly. "I'm taking you straight home to bed. If there's anything to say about rings—well, it can wait until tomorrow."

ROCKY POINT LIGHT

JOAN, would you care to visit the Rocky Point lighthouse while you're here?" Gail questioned her friend the next morning as they lingered over breakfast. "Aunt Ella thought you might enjoy the trip."

The tall white tower of Rocky Point Light could be seen plainly from the window, and at night its bright beam flashed like a ghost across the veranda of Pirate Inn.

"I'd love it!" she declared promptly. "I didn't suppose visitors were allowed."

"Oh, Mr. Hodges and his wife enjoy having folks come. They stay at the Light the year around and it's a lonesome life. We might go today, if you like."

"Why, yes," Joan began eagerly, then frowned slightly. "There's only one thing and I guess that doesn't matter. I've made a little progress with our mystery, and I thought we might locate Bob and I'd report my findings."

Gail stared blankly.

"But there's nothing new about the ring, is there? We've not even glanced at the diary."

"Well, I didn't waste my time at the library last night," Joan smiled. "I gleaned a number of ideas."

Gail looked skeptical. She cared little for reading and found it difficult to believe that a library book could yield information which might have an important connection with the locket or the silver ring.

"You never breathed a hint of it last night, Joan."

"Oh, yes, I did. I tried to tell you all about it, but I saw you were too tired to listen."

"I was out of sorts last night," Gail admitted. "I'm all ears now."

"Why not wait until we see Bob? It will save my telling the story twice."

"I'll tell you what we can do! Let's invite Bob to go with us to Rocky Point Light! We can take our lunch and start right away."

Joan enthusiastically agreed, and they raced down to the beach to locate Bob. They found him teaching a swimming class but he paused in his work long enough to assure them that he could make the trip and would be ready to start within an hour.

By eleven o'clock a light lunch had been packed. *The Minx* was loaded with gas and waiting when Bob joined the girls at the wharf. Mrs. Huston came down to see them off.

"Joan has something important to tell us about the ring," Gail informed, as they made for open water. "I've been teasing all morning, but she won't even give me a hint as to what it is."

"I didn't mean to build up suspense," Joan laughed. "I've been waiting for a chance to tell you both at the same time. This isn't a very good place either for I can't shout above the wind."

"We'll wait until we reach Rocky Point Light," Gail agreed.

After some maneuvering Gail brought *The Minx* to a mooring. While Bob unloaded the lunch basket, the girls surveyed their surroundings.

Rocky Point island, shimmering under the glare of a mid-day sun, was not as inviting as Joan had anticipated. There were no trees or vegetation of any kind, and as

they walked slowly up the path, the only visible living creatures were the seagulls which threatened to overrun the place. The higher portion of the island served as a substantial base for the white tower, rising to a height of nearly a hundred and fifty feet. Grouped close by were the fog-signal station and the power-house.

Before the girls had wandered far, Bob caught up with them.

"Mr. and Mrs. Hodges must be at lunch or they'd have seen us come," he commented, glancing about the deserted island. "I'm as hungry as a Polar bear!"

"So am I," Gail rejoined, eyeing the lunch basket with interest. "Perhaps it might be better to have something to eat ourselves before asking the Hodgeses to take us through the lighthouse. I see a shady spot over by the powerhouse."

They spread out their sandwiches and fruit on a large, flat rock which made an excellent table. After the first pangs of appetite had been appeased, Gail brought up the subject of the silver ring, demanding the information Joan had promised to impart.

"This may not seem important to you," Joan began, "but I have a theory to explain that queer Latin inscription we discovered on the ring. When Gail and I were at the library searching for the dictionary, I stumbled upon an interesting book about jewelry. It was an old one and couldn't be taken from the library."

"Will you ever get to the point?" Gail questioned impatiently.

"I'm arriving as fast as I can. For one thing I learned that our silver ring has a special name and is very, very old. In fact, it may be an heirloom dating back beyond the seventeenth century."

"Why, that was in Shakespeare's time," Gail marveled.

"'The Merchant of Venice' was registered in 1598. I know because Mr. Balerton told us."

"What makes you think our ring is so old?" Bob asked, not entirely convinced.

"I can't be absolutely certain, of course, but pictures and descriptions in various books point to such a conclusion."

"You mean this ring actually was pictured in a book?"

"Well, no, it wasn't, but a ring very similar to ours was shown. They were of the same classification."

"Now what do you mean by that?" Bob caught her up.

"Just this. I'm firmly convinced that our ring is nothing less than a genuine *gimmel*!"

Joan sat back, watching the effect of this announcement upon her companions. She was disappointed at their blank expressions. After a moment of silence, Gail demanded bluntly: "What is a gimmel ring? I never heard of such a thing."

"Neither did I until last night," Joan admitted. "According to this book on jewelry they were fairly common in the seventeenth century. They had a number of strange uses—I'll go into that later. The important thing from our standpoint is that a gimmel really consists of *two* rings!"

"Two!" Gail echoed, puzzled.

"Yes, twin rings. One fits inside the other and is kept in place by a projection on the side of the exterior circle, so that when the ring is worn it gives the appearance of being only one instead of two. Clever idea, isn't it? The book says that some gimmels are held together by clasps and others by projecting hands so arranged that when the twin rings are united the hands appear clasped together."

"But our ring isn't like that," Gail protested. "It does have a hand, but one rim doesn't fit over another."

"But don't you realize why?" Joan gestured impressively with her sandwich. "It's because we have only *half* of the ring. *The inside disc is missing!*"

"What a girl!" Bob exclaimed, admiringly. "You're the brains of our little organization, Joan. Now tell us what became of the missing half."

"Naturally, the book couldn't help me on that. But in the light of what we've learned, it's easy to guess why only a part of that Latin inscription appears on the ring."

"You think the remainder of the quotation may appear on the missing half?" Gail guessed.

"I'm confident of it. A great many gimmel rings either had names of persons or an inscription engraved on the inside of the bands. A portion of the quotation sometimes appeared on one ring and the rest of it on the other. 'Posies' Mr. Shakespeare called them."

Gail looked startled.

"Why, Mr. Balerton was explaining about 'posies' last night. Only I didn't listen very closely."

"I did. He didn't say much that I hadn't read before. But Mr. Balerton must know a lot about ancient rings. I mean to question him upon the subject of twin rings if I get a chance."

"It might be worth trying," Bob said, without conviction. "A girl might make him talk but he's the original sphinx around the fellows."

"I'll see that you have an opportunity to talk with him," Gail promised. "What were you going to tell us about the special uses of twin rings?"

"In former times gimmals were used frequently as a means of identification. When the ring was separated into twin units, one part served as a credential to the bearer

who thus was identified as being in the confidence of the person who owned the gimmal."

"That's interesting," Bob commented.

Without noticing the interruption, Joan continued: "Another purpose, and the one I consider of real significance to us, was the exchange of twin rings by an engaged couple. At the announcement of their betrothal, the ring was separated into two units, the girl keeping one part and her fiance the other. After the marriage, the twin rings were united and worn as one ring by the bride."

"Then our gimmal could have been a betrothal ring," Gail remarked, her eyes brightening at the thought of a romance. "And do you feel certain that twin rings date back into the seventeenth century?"

"Yes, they were very common at that time, though they have become very rare now. I found an interesting reference in Dryden's *Don Sebastian*, written in the latter part of the seventeenth century. I think I can recall how it went:

'—A curious artist wrought 'em—
with joints so close as not to be perceived;
Yet are they both each other's counterpart!'

There's more but I've forgotten it."

"Listen to the girl quote," Bob said banteringly. "Dryden was always dry as powder to me and here Joan rattles him off like Mother Goose!"

"Oh, Bob," Gail broke in impatiently, "don't try to be funny now. That quotation fits our ring to a 'T'. What more did you learn, Joan?"

"That's about all, I think."

"Then let's try to sum up what we've learned so far and see if we can make anything of it. In the first place,

we're pretty sure the ring we found in the locket is half of a gimmel."

"Probably the outside circle," Joan interposed.

"The ring must have belonged to the girl that owned the steamer trunk," Gail went on. "What I'm getting at is this. Is there any connection between the ring, the girl, and that young man whose picture appears in the locket?"

"It's an interesting triangle," Joan returned quickly. "I have a feeling the couple may have been engaged. And that gives me an idea! Perhaps the young man presented her with the gimmel as a betrothal ring."

"Part of it, you mean," Bob grinned. "I'd like to meet the man who had the courage to give a modern girl only half a ring. Girls these days want whole rings, and big, flashy ones at that, so they can sparkle 'em under some other girl's nose and make her jealous."

"You're too cynical for your years," Gail chided. "I think the old tradition of separating the ring into twin units was nice."

"We're arriving at the all-important question," Joan said, interrupting Bob who was ready to launch into an attack upon Gail's romanticism. "Why were the twin rings never joined together again?"

"Something must have happened to prevent the marriage," Gail answered promptly.

As the same thought occurred to the three simultaneously, troubled expressions were mirrored in their faces. It was Bob who put what they were thinking into words.

"We're right back where we started from. The girl lost her life when *The Breneman* was wrecked in the hurricane. That's why the twin rings were never united."

"Oh, let's not believe that," Joan pleaded. "If we do, it will end our little game. And I can't make myself think

the girl really did drown. Surely, the man to whom she was engaged or some relative would have inquired about her."

"Perhaps she just disappeared after the boat was wrecked," Gail suggested hopefully.

"And left her trunk behind?" Bob demanded scoffingly. "Especially when it contained a valuable locket and ring! No, I think she went down with the ship."

"That's not the proper spirit for a life-guard," Gail reproved. "You should cling to the last shred of hope where human life is concerned."

"I can't help it if I'm practical, can I? Anyway, this is all past history. I wonder just how valuable our gimmal ring really is?"

"It must be a very rare heirloom," Joan said thoughtfully. "I imagine that few twin rings are in existence today—at least outside of museums."

Bob watched the waves dash against the rocks at the base of the lighthouse. "Look here," he began earnestly, "if twin rings are valued as heirlooms, that fact in itself might explain why the silver ring was in the girl's trunk—it was one of the prized possessions of the family. Maybe we're trying to make a mystery of something that isn't a mystery at all."

"You're forgetting that only half of the ring appeared in the locket," Joan reminded him. "The gimmal was separated, and I want to know why."

Bob arose, gathering up several papers which had scattered from their lunch.

"Well, I can't tell you, Joan. I guess my theory won't hold water."

"I'm still convinced that an unusual story lies behind that ring," Joan maintained firmly, "and until we think

of a better idea, I'm in favor of sticking to the betrothal theory."

The girls arose, for they realized that Bob was impatient to begin the inspection of the lighthouse. He had promised to guard the beach at four o'clock and wished to return home a little early.

As the three walked up the path to the tower, the door of the house opened and a middle-aged woman came out. She seemed surprised at seeing the young people.

"Dear me, when did you arrive and how did you get here?" she asked cordially. "Mr. Hodges and I must have been asleep at our post. Do come in."

She led the way up a flight of narrow, winding stairs to the living quarters. Joan surveyed the circular room with keen interest. It was small but very compact, with built-in tables, bookcases and cupboards.

"You see, we have all the comforts of a modern apartment," Mrs. Hodges smiled.

"It's very cosy and convenient," Joan said appreciatively.

"Yes," Mrs. Hodges agreed. "John and I like it here. Only sometimes I feel the want of space, and wish I could push out a wall to make the room larger."

Joan noticed that the woman was an excellent housekeeper. The metal work shone like silver, everything was in its place, and the tiny quarters were very homelike.

Gail and Bob, who had visited the lighthouse several times, had no desire to make the long climb to the light tower. They declared that while Joan went up with Mrs. Hodges they would chat with the lighthouse keeper who was working in the power house.

Together Joan and Mrs. Hodges climbed the narrow, winding flight of stairs, pausing frequently to catch their breath.

"The view is wonderful from here," the lighthouse keeper's wife informed her as they at length reached the top landing. "Crystal Bay is plainly visible."

She explained that on a clear night the Rocky Point light could be seen plainly by ships within a radius of eighteen miles, and as Joan inspected the huge revolving reflector, rattled off technical terms with a rapidity which left the girl a trifle dazed.

"I'm proud to say that in all the years Mr. Hodges has been in charge, the light has never failed to burn," the woman remarked. "We've had some bad storms here too."

Joan observed that the life must be a very lonesome one.

"Yes, but we've grown used to it. Mr. Hodges insists that I take a long vacation every two years. Only last year I had a splendid trip to Cuba, and two years before that I went North. Once I spent a month in Bermuda."

"Bermuda?" Joan questioned with interest.

Mrs. Hodges smiled at the recollection.

"I'll never forget that trip as long as I live. In returning, my steamer was caught in a terrible storm—one of the worst I've ever experienced. Poor Mr. Hodges heard our S.O.S. call over the radio, and you may imagine his state of mind. He was chained here to the light, yet he felt I was in grave danger."

"It must have been nerve wracking," Joan agreed. "Weren't you frightened too?"

"Oh, I suppose I was a little nervous after the ship went aground, but I was too busy quieting the other women passengers to give much thought to my own danger. It comforted me just to see the Rocky Point light shining out over the water. I knew too that the Coast Guard would reach us before the ship foundered."

"What boat were you on?" Joan questioned.

Involuntarily, Mrs. Hodges turned to gaze from the tower window, her eyes seeking Crystal Bay and a tiny building which was barely visible upon a slight knoll.

"Well, you can see my ship from here," she returned, with a sweep of her hand indicating Pirate Inn. "I sailed upon *The Breneman*."

AT TURKILL ISLE

JOAN was so startled at Mrs. Hodges' casual response to her question that for a moment she could only repeat blankly: "*The Breneman*, did you say?"

"Yes," the light keeper's wife responded, "you must know the story, for Gail tells me you are visiting her at Pirate Inn."

By this time, Joan had recovered her poise. It was odd, she thought, that Gail and Bob had neglected to tell her that Mrs. Hodges had been a passenger aboard the ill-fated steamer. The woman might prove to be a gold mine of information.

"Really, I know very little about the wreck," she said, almost too eagerly. "I wish you'd tell me all about it. Were any lives lost?"

"I think not, although the trunk of one passenger never was claimed, so I was told. When the storm became violent everyone was ordered below deck as a precautionary measure. I went with the others, of course. The Coast Guard arrived in time to take everyone off before the ship began to break up."

"But this one passenger who never claimed her trunk?" Joan interposed quickly. "What became of her?"

"I don't know," Mrs. Hodges acknowledged frankly. "It's worried me ever since, for if she was the girl I think, she was a most charming person."

"You met her then?" Joan probed.

"I can't be certain she was the same person, of

course. But the first day out of Bermuda I noticed a beautiful, young girl sitting alone on deck. She looked lonesome and forlorn. I sat down beside her and we struck up a conversation, though I must say she wasn't inclined to offer any information about herself, except to tell me that she was traveling alone. I looked forward to knowing her better before the voyage ended, but after that day, I never saw her again."

"You never saw her again?" Joan echoed blankly, her heart sinking. She had hoped that the data Mrs. Hodges could impart might go a long way toward solving the ring mystery.

"No, she kept close to her cabin. Doubtlessly, she was seasick as were many of the passengers."

"But at the time the Coast Guard took the passengers from the ship, didn't you catch a glimpse of her?"

Mrs. Hodges shook her head.

"Everything was confused at the time. Later I inquired but no one seemed to know what had become of her."

"You don't think she went overboard before the rescue crew arrived?" Joan asked, almost afraid to hear the answer.

"No one saw her swept overboard, I'm certain of that. But if she disregarded the order to stay below, she might easily have been carried over the railing." Mrs. Hodges turned toward the stairway. "The sea hides many a mystery, you know."

Thoughtfully, Joan followed the light keeper's wife down the iron steps.

Bob and Gail were waiting for her at the base of the tower. She had no opportunity then to tell them of her conversation with Mrs. Hodges, but when they had returned to the motor-boat, she related it in detail.

"Now that you mention it, I do recall that Mrs. Hodges

was on the boat," Gail admitted. "She was the only passenger from this vicinity, I believe."

"I didn't learn anything of consequence," Joan said regretfully. "She told me that the girl was very beautiful and that she was traveling alone."

"But we can't be certain the girl she described is the same one who lost the trunk," Bob pointed out. "There may have been a dozen beautiful girls on the ship."

The discussion ended abruptly as Gail started the motor-boat. Waving good-bye to Mr. and Mrs. Hodges, they pointed the nose of *The Minx* toward Pirate Inn and were soon safely moored at the wharf.

Despite Gail's oft repeated complaint that nothing exciting ever happened at Crystal Beach, Joan discovered that such a strenuous program of entertainment had been planned there was little time left. She had postponed reading the diary, fully expecting to get at it the day following. First the trip to the lighthouse had kept her from her task, then a long motor ride through the country, and for the next day Gail announced that the Swimmers' Club had planned an outing at Turkill Isle.

"Dear me, when do you rest?" Joan demanded. But she was pleased at the prospect of a picnic.

One o'clock of the succeeding day found twenty boys and girls gathered at the water front, awaiting the signal to start for Turkill Isle. Mrs. Huston's *Minx* had been heavily loaded with lunch baskets, thermos jugs and an ice cream freezer. Other boats tied up nearby rapidly filled with passengers.

Bob had offered his boat for the occasion. It was a peculiar looking craft very appropriately named, "The Dying Swan." He had constructed it himself of materials purchased sight-unseen from a "build it yourself" manufacturer. The boat was awkward to handle, slow, and

the seams leaked. In addition, the second-hand engine often balked. While the other boats rapidly filled, the *Dying Swan* was coldly ignored by those who were still awaiting some means of transportation.

"Oh, let's be kind hearted and ride with him," Gail said to Joan. "We may get to Turkill and we may not, but it will be an experience."

Bob grinned his appreciation of such loyalty as the girls stepped gingerly into the oily cockpit. After brushing off seats for them he turned his attention to the motor.

"For whom are we waiting?" Joan asked after a few minutes had elapsed.

"Margery, as usual. We could go without her only she promised her boat."

Just then a shout went up as someone sighted the familiar Annas speed-boat cutting through the water. A few minutes later it eased up to the wharf. While Margery took on the last of the passengers, the other boats began to pull away.

Mrs. Huston, at the wheel of *The Minx*, waited until she saw that everyone had a means of conveyance, then she too left. The *Dying Swan* was the last boat to get away for at the critical moment it lived up to its name and refused to start. While Bob tinkered patiently with the engine, the girls gazed ruefully after their more favored companions.

"If you strand us here, Bob, we'll never forgive you," Gail said severely. "What's the matter with the old thing now?"

There was no need for an answer. Just at that moment the motor responded with a feeble sputter which quickly developed into an ear-splitting roar. The girls exchanged

brief glances of sympathy and gave up all attempts at conversation.

Bob, with the air of a proud yachtsman, took his place at the helm. The boat moved slowly from the wharf and at the same painful speed began its journey to Turkill Isle.

"Not bad, once you get her to going," he chuckled.

Gail raised her feet from the floor to prevent them from being soaked by water which slowly trickled through the seams.

"When you knocked this boat together I think you missed one of the pages of instruction," she sniffed. "I'm afraid we may have to swim to the island yet."

"It doesn't leak enough to notice. Anyway, I brought along a bailer."

"I suppose we should be thankful for small favors," Gail retorted good-naturedly.

The day was pleasant and it was good to be on the water in any sort of craft. Only the thought that they might be missing some of the fun at Turkill Isle, made the girls impatient. Each unusual throb or cough of the engine sent a chill to their hearts. But the *Dying Swan* did not dishonor her master. In due time she brought them safely to the island beach.

"Here they come at last!" a youth cried, waving a welcoming hand. "We almost gave you up as lost. Hurry and get into your bathing suits! Margery brought her surf-board and we're taking turns riding it!"

"Don't wait for me," Bob said to Joan and Gail.

The girls hurried up the path to a shack which had been designated as a dressing room. They quickly changed and as they sped hand in hand to the beach on the opposite side of the island, Gail noted with approval that her companion wore a neat black wool suit, minus all frills.

At the crest of a little knoll overlooking the long stretch of white beach, the girls paused to watch a motor-boat round the point with a surf-board in tow. Suddenly the rider, a boy, lost his balance, and shot off into the water, landing with a great splash. Emerging, he swam toward the boat which had slowed down to pick him up.

"Did you ever ride a board?" Gail asked.

"Never. Is it hard?"

"Not so very once you learn the trick of it. But the turns get you at first."

They raced down the path to the beach where they were joined by a group of boys and girls. Bob had not yet appeared. While they were chatting with Mrs. Huston, Margery Annas brought her boat in within hailing distance.

"Ready for the next passenger!" she shouted. "How about you, Miss Bernell?"

Joan hesitated, scarcely knowing what to say. Gail came quickly to her rescue.

"Oh, give her a chance to get wet first, Margery. She's never been on a surf-board and your boat goes so fast."

"Then you're next, Mrs. Huston," Margery called out.

"Many thanks but I'm not feeling ambitious today," Mrs. Huston laughed. "I haven't been on a board in five years."

"Oh, come on, do be a sport."

Mrs. Huston shook her head. She was tired and preferred to remain half buried in the sand under the shade of a beach umbrella.

"I believe you're afraid of a spill," Margery challenged.

"Perhaps I am," Mrs. Huston admitted, slightly nettled. "At my age one doesn't enjoy being thrown off into the water with the boat going at top speed."

"I'll not go fast," Margery promised.

"Do try it, Mrs. Huston," several of the young people who had gathered around her urged.

Reluctantly, Mrs. Huston permitted them to dig her out of the sand. Catching her hands, two of the bathers fairly dragged her toward the boat.

"Come along and watch the fun," Margery invited Gail and Joan. "There's plenty of room."

The girls waded out and were helped aboard.

"Now remember, no fancy tricks!" Mrs. Huston warned.

Margery kept her promise and as Mrs. Huston assumed an upright position on the surf-board maintained an even, moderate speed. But soon a straight course grew irksome, and she began to swing the boat in gentle curves which grew sharper and sharper as Mrs. Huston maintained a footing on the board.

"She's as expert as any of us," Margery declared with a laugh.

She increased the speed of the boat, until Mrs. Huston was taxed to the utmost in maintaining her balance.

"Not so fast," Gail warned, looking sharply at Margery. "Aunt Ella isn't as young as we are."

"She's doing fine," Margery returned, unmoved. "Anyway, a little spill won't hurt her."

"It stings plenty at this speed," Gail responded. "I wish—"

She did not finish for just then Joan who never had taken her eyes from the surf-board, uttered a little cry: "Oh, there she goes!"

The others saw only the splash as Mrs. Huston hurtled through the air and struck the water. Joan had observed more. In a desperate effort to save herself a spill, Mrs. Huston had lunged forward. She crouched and for an

instant seemed to have recovered her balance. Then the board catapulted her into the water in such a manner that her head struck the edge of it. And she had submerged without a struggle.

"Stop!" Joan screamed to Margery. Without waiting for the boat's speed to slacken, she dived.

Before the others had recovered from their astonishment, even before they realized that Mrs. Huston needed assistance, she was swimming with long, powerful strokes toward the place where the woman had submerged.

Suddenly those who watched saw Joan bend slightly at the waist and shoot down into the water in a surface dive. There was a little wait which seemed endless, then she emerged with the limp form of Mrs. Huston.

By this time Gail had plunged in to help and together they brought the woman to the boat although Joan who was well trained in life-saving could have carried her easily alone. Margery, white-faced and badly frightened, aided in getting her aboard. Mrs. Huston opened her eyes and tried to protest at being stretched out on the bottom of the boat.

"What happened?" she asked.

"You struck the board and it stunned you," Joan told her gently. "Lie still and we'll soon have you ashore."

But Mrs. Huston refused to submit to such treatment, insisting upon sitting up.

"I'll feel all right in a minute or so," she declared, gingerly feeling of the lump on her head. "I'm too old to be riding surf-boards. I should have known better."

"It was my fault," Margery apologized contritely. The accident had left her somewhat shaken. "I shouldn't have taken those curves so fast."

Mrs. Huston made light of her mis-adventure and would not even allow her head to be bandaged. She

walked a trifle unsteadily when she reached shore but sat down on the beach and regaled her listeners with a humorous account of what had happened.

"It was nothing," she insisted when Bob, who had joined the anxious group, offered to take her home. "I refuse to ruin the picnic."

Nevertheless, all interest in surf-board riding had been killed for the day. Everyone went swimming instead. Many admiring glances were cast in Joan's direction and she was highly praised for the speedy way she had gone to Mrs. Huston's rescue.

Joan easily stood out as one of the best swimmers at the picnic. Bob in particular noted the easy rhythm of her arms, the steady leg thrash, and knew that behind such apparent smoothness lay years of faithful practice.

"You certainly can swim the crawl!" Gail commented admiringly. "Modest thing! You never even hinted you were good."

"I don't know that I am even now," Joan laughed.

"If you don't believe me, ask Bob. He's beaming like a lighthouse. He's always like that when he unearths what he calls a 'find'."

Bob strolled over to break into the conversation.

"You do have a dandy stroke, Joan. Ever been in competition?"

"Oh, some, but I never went in for it seriously."

"Well, it's a good idea not to ride a sport to death, but on the other hand, it's a shame to let a fine stroke go to waste. Competition, I think, brings out the best that a person has in him."

"Or the worst," Gail murmured.

"Joan, why not train for the island swim?"

"Would I have a chance against your champion, do you think?"

"Would you have a chance?" Bob lowered his voice, aware that they were attracting attention. "You'd worry Margery sick. You're the only girl at Crystal Beach this year who can give her a good race."

"She's been watching you like a hawk ever since you jumped in after Aunt Ella," Gail added with relish. "Oh, Joan, if I could just borrow that stroke of yours for one day, I'd go out and win!"

"I wish I could give it to you."

"You'll think it over, won't you?" Bob asked.

"Yes, but I'm not as good on long stretches as I am on sprints. After the first quarter-mile I crawl along like a turtle."

"The proverbial turtle won the race, if you recall your fables," Gail cut in.

"Perhaps you never trained for distance swimming," Bob commented seriously.

"No, I never did," Joan admitted frankly. "I like to swim for the fun of it. I just jump in and keep going until I'm tired—which usually isn't very long."

"That's entirely wrong," Bob told her severely in the professional tone which he reserved for the members of his swimming class. "Endurance must be built up slowly. If you care to enter the race, I'll coach you."

"Oh, that's fine of you," Joan returned gratefully. "I scarcely know what to say."

"Bob doesn't offer to coach everyone," Gail informed, feeling that Joan should have accepted without an instant's thought. "He turned Margery down flat and she offered to pay him whatever he asked. If you enter, nearly everyone at Crystal Beach will be plugging for you to win."

"It takes more than encouragement to win a race."

"Right," Bob agreed heartily. "But just knock the

head and tail off that word 'encouragement' and what do you have? Courage!"

Joan's response to this challenge was an infectious laugh.

"I think they're dishing out the lunch. Let's go find out."

The swim had given everyone an appetite. Hampers were dragged out and opened. Sandwiches, salads, cakes and an endless assortment of delicacies were greedily devoured by the famished young people. Then at length as the sun was sinking low, the débris was all cleared away, the last paper plate was hurled into the bay, and the picnic came to an official end.

Joan was tired when she reached Pirate Inn, but she was not too weary to remember that an important task awaited her attention.

"I'm fairly itching to read that diary we found in the trunk," she announced. "I have a feeling we may learn something that will tell us more about the twin ring."

"You want to read it tonight?" Gail asked, with a yawn.

"I'd like to. We've postponed it for so long now."

They barricaded themselves in their bedroom and Joan brought out the little leather journal. Flinging themselves upon the bed, they eagerly perused the stained pages.

"You see," Gail murmured in disappointment after they had examined several pages. "The ink has faded badly and the writing is terribly cramped. It's next to impossible to read a word even with the magnifying glass."

Joan admitted that the material did not look very promising. After a half hour's hard work they had puzzled out only a portion of one page. The passage was disappointingly trite. It was a brief notation concerning a dinner party.

Although discouraged, the girls did not give up. For an hour and a half they kept doggedly at work. At the end of that period, Gail threw down her pencil in disgust.

"We might just as well have permitted Sadie to take the old thing to Michigan!"

"We may find something yet," Joan encouraged.

"It's just a waste of time," Gail returned wearily. "Aunt Ella went over the journal and gave it up. I'm sure I haven't the patience to dig at it an instant longer. I'm going to bed."

With a yawn, she arose and stretched herself.

"Mind if I sit up a little longer?" Joan asked. "I'm still interested."

"Sit up all night if you like. Here's wishing you luck."

Turning out all the lights save the reading lamp, Joan settled herself at the desk. Gail tumbled into bed and in a few minutes was asleep.

Joan worked steadily at the little journal. It was dull reading. Several times she yawned and gazed longingly toward the bed.

"Gail was right," she thought once. "There's nothing here. I'll read one more page and then turn in."

She thumbed over several pages, selecting one at random for her final effort. Unexpectedly, as she read the cramped writing, a word stood out above the others, commanding attention.

She gave a little gasp of astonishment, glancing quickly toward Gail who was sleeping soundly. Then, poring eagerly over the page, Joan began to read with feverish haste.

It was well after twelve o'clock when, with a guilty glance at the desk clock, she reluctantly closed the diary,

returning it to the bureau drawer. She moved over to the bed, tempted to awaken Gail, but resisted the impulse.

"No," she decided, "I'll wait until tomorrow. "And maybe I haven't a real surprise for her!"

WHAT THE DIARY REVEALED

THE morning sun scarcely had warmed the beach when Joan, her terry cloth robe wrapped tightly about her, slipped quietly from Pirate Inn and raced down the path to the bay. The air was fresh and invigorating; the water, blue and sparkling. Joan took a deep breath as she kicked off her bathing clogs. She liked deserted beaches and early morning swims.

Presently, Joan observed a solitary figure on the diving platform which had been anchored some distance out in deep water.

"That must be Bob," she decided. "I'll swim out and say good morning."

Gingerly, she thrust a slender ankle into the water. It was very cold. She shivered and ran out to meet an incoming wave. It washed over her. She plunged boldly into the next one and quickly warmed up by sprinting a few yards. Soon she settled down to a slow steady crawl which in a few minutes brought her near the floating raft.

Lifting her head from the water to view the figure on the platform, Joan was a little disappointed to see that it was not Bob Bartley but her new acquaintance, Margery Annas. She had no particular desire to meet the girl again, but since she was less than twenty-five yards from the float, it would not do to retreat. She swam on, presently finding herself at the lower rung of the ladder.

"Hello," she greeted pleasantly, brushing the water from her eyes. "I see I'm not the only early bird."

Margery acknowledged the greeting with greater cordiality than Joan had expected. She was aware too, that for some minutes during her approach to the float, her stroke had been subjected to intense scrutiny.

"You swim very well," Margery praised unexpectedly.

"Thank you," Joan returned, and offered a compliment of her own. "I hear that you are the champion here at Crystal Beach."

"Yes, I've won all the cups for the past two years. By the way, you're not thinking of entering the Turkill race are you?"

Margery tried to speak casually, but failed. She waited, almost tensely for Joan's answer.

"Gail and Bob have been urging me to compete," Joan responded, surprised at the abrupt question. "I haven't thought much about it. From what I hear the competition is very keen."

Margery smiled at the implied compliment.

"Yes, it is. Still, I believe you might have a chance *if* you were eligible to compete."

Joan did not miss the implication. When she remained silent, Margery went on:

"I'm so very glad you weren't counting on entering the race, for it might be a disappointment to you."

"What do you mean?" Joan asked.

"As I understand the rules of the race, you're not eligible to compete. You're not a resident of Crystal Beach."

"No, I'm only visiting here. Gail said nothing to me of the residence requirement."

"It may not be a written rule," Margery admitted, "but it's generally understood."

"Like the president of the United States accepting a third term," Joan supplied dryly. "It just isn't done."

"That's the idea. You see if the race were open to anyone—well, it wouldn't be fair to the local girls."

Joan digested this speech as she tested the diving board by bouncing up and down on it several times in succession. Her arms swung rhythmically and to prove to herself that she had perfect balance, she clicked her heels together in mid-air.

"I hadn't thought much about entering, Margery. And even if I did swim in the race, my competition shouldn't worry anyone."

She sprang lightly from the board, waited for her height, then bent sharply at the waist to touch her pointed toes and break the water in the straight line entry of the jack-knife dive. Reappearing at the surface, she whisked a wisp of hair from her eyes and swam slowly back to the platform. Ignoring the ladder, she raised herself up by the sheer strength of muscular arms.

"Of course, it's nothing to me who enters the race," Margery took up the conversation again. "I shouldn't have mentioned it at all, only I thought you might want to know about the rules."

"Why, yes, thanks for telling me," Joan smiled.

Margery quickly arose. With the remark that it was time she was getting back to the beach, she dived from the platform and swam rapidly away. A trifle too rapidly, Joan thought. The sprint was for her benefit, she knew, and she smiled when the pace slackened a few yards away.

"Margery is good," she acknowledged, thoughtfully hugging her knees, "but somehow I can't see her as the future owner of Mrs. Huston's beautiful locket or the twin ring!"

She watched the long, brown arms flash in and out of

the water. They were cutting in slightly—not a serious fault, but noticeable. Margery's leg kick too was lazy and the entire stroke lacked a certain smoothness and finish which one expected in a champion swimmer.

Joan waited until Margery had reached the beach before plunging in to follow. Striking shallow water a short distance from shore, she slowly waded in and was pleased to see Bob emerging from the bath house. Margery had disappeared.

"I didn't know you were such an ambitious young person," Bob remarked as Joan splashed up. "Where's Gail?"

"She was in bed when I left. I tried to get her to come with me but she was too sleepy. She'll probably be along in a few minutes now."

"Knowing how Gail loves to sleep, I'd judge it would be much later."

"You may be wrong this time, Bob. You see, I have something most important to report about the gimmal ring. I warned her that if she expected to hear the latest discovery, she must be here by eight o'clock."

Bob whistled softly.

"A discovery a day seems to be your motto, Joan! Don't tell me you've learned more about the ring since yesterday."

Joan laughed mysteriously.

"Oh, haven't I? Just wait until you hear! I sat up until after midnight last night digging into the diary. I do wish Gail would hurry. It must be eight o'clock."

Bob turned to peer in the direction of Pirate Inn. He indicated an approaching figure far up the beach.

"I think that must be Gail now."

"Then you'd better hurry if you intend to take your

dip," Joan urged, noticing that he had brought a bath towel with him.

"Oh, I'll let that go until later. I'd far rather hear about the ring."

"I haven't learned much more about it," Joan admitted, "but I did gather a few other interesting facts."

Gail came hurrying up, trim and fresh in a pale blue sports frock, but her eyes which usually were animated, had a sleepy expression.

"Such an unholy hour to get me down here!" she protested. "Joan, if your news isn't worth while, I'll never forgive you."

"I think you'll be satisfied. Did you meet Margery on the path?"

"Yes, I did. She didn't look very pleased about something."

"I'm the something," Joan responded with a chuckle. "I ran into her out on the diving platform and we had a little chat about the race?"

"How about it?" Bob broke in eagerly. "Have you decided to enter?"

"Why, I learned I'm not eligible."

"Margery told you that?" Gail demanded indignantly. "Why, the race is open to any girl between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. Last year Georgia Baker took third place and she was only here on a two week's vacation with her mother."

"It doesn't seem entirely fair for an outsider to compete," Joan went on, paraphrasing Margery's words.

"What's unfair about it?" Bob asked bluntly. "Margery must have said that because she's afraid you will enter. Unless you do, she has the race cinched."

"But Gail, you say you're not entering."

"If I were half the swimmer you are, Joan, I'd not

hesitate an instant. Of course, I might feel reluctant about it since Aunt Ella is offering the trophy, but with the locket in the balance I doubt if even that would stop me. She isn't any relation to you, so that objection couldn't hold true in your case."

"Don't allow what Margery said to influence you," Bob pleaded. "I detest poor sportsmanship. Regardless of who wins the locket, I'd like to see a good fast, close race. Unless you enter it's almost certain to be a walk-away."

"If I should decide to go in for it, I'd want to train," she said hesitatingly.

"Of course," Bob agreed promptly, "but there's still enough time. Swimming doesn't require such rigid training as most sports. What do you say?"

"All right," Joan decided suddenly. "I'll enter!"

Gail caught her friend by the waist, whirling her joyfully about. "Oh, I'm so glad! And I do hope you teach Margery a lesson."

"Look out," Joan warned. "You're getting your dress all wet."

"I'll be glad to help you with your stroke any time you like," Bob offered. "Usually the beach is deserted about this time in the morning. The only other time I have free is late at night or on my day off."

"I don't mind getting up early," Joan interposed quickly.

"Well, I do," Gail complained good-naturedly. "I mean to be on hand to encourage you in the good work you know, even if it kills me!"

"It won't hurt you a bit," Joan teased. "And to make it more interesting, perhaps we can arrange to have all our reports on the twin ring mystery at the same hour."

"We'll have to have the discussions after the swim,"

Bob advised firmly. "Otherwise there won't be any practice, for we'll get so interested talking that we'll use up all the time. And now let's hear what Joan has to tell us this morning."

Gail spread out a beach robe over the sand and sat down upon it. "Yes, do tell us what you discovered in that diary after I went to sleep last night. Remember, I tore myself from my bed to hear this, so make it good!"

Joan dropped down beside Gail and Bob comfortably sprawled himself flat upon his back.

"I wrote it all down on a piece of paper," Joan informed, fishing in a pocket of the bathrobe which lay crumpled in a heap nearby. "Now where is it?"

Gail eyed her accusingly.

"Joan Bernell, if you've lost it—"

"No, here it is. Gail, after you went to bed last night I read and read in that diary, and I tell you it was tiresome work."

"I know. I guess I gave up too soon. I never did have any patience with details."

"The material was disappointing at first. Mostly trite comments about trips to the dressmaker, the visit of friends, dinner parties and the like. The only thing of significance about all the early notations was that the writer obviously came from a well-to-do family."

"We guessed that before," Gail reminded her. "I hope that wasn't all you discovered."

"No, I was just on the verge of giving up when I struck something which fairly made my hair stand on end!"

"Say, we'll be tearing ours out by the roots if you don't stop tantalizing us!" Bob cut in gruffly. "Don't bother to soften the news! Give it to us in the raw."

"Well, I can't very well start in the middle," Joan

defended mischievously. She was enjoying her advantage. Carefully, she unfolded the sheet of paper and studied it. "I copied down only the paragraphs that seemed the most interesting. Unfortunately, most of them are not dated. Now if you're both ready, I'll read the first notation."

"Go ahead, before we take that paper away from you!" Bob ordered.

"All right, here we go. Remember it's a girl who is doing the writing.

" 'Tomorrow I shall be on my way to the United States. My conscience troubles me sorely at the thought of leaving my father under such trying circumstance. But I realize there is no other way. To remain is to submit to his will and that I cannot do.' "

"This *is* exciting!" Gail squealed in delight. "But I'm like a newspaper reporter. I want to know the who, when and where of the thing."

"Well, you must use your imagination, I fear. The time, I happen to know, is shortly before the hurricane, and the place must be Bermuda. I can tell you part of the girl's name too."

"You can? Why, that's more than Aunt Ella ever learned. What is it?"

Joan was not inclined to ruin the surprise element of her story by revealing facts too soon.

"Wait until I come to it. Let me read on:

" 'Perhaps I am doing wrong to take the ring, but it was my Mother's and she always said I should have it on my eighteenth birthday or whenever I announced my engagement. Were she here now I feel certain she would give it to me with her blessing.' "

"She must refer to the gimmal ring!" Bob exclaimed,

greatly impressed. "And the little scamp swiped it from her Dad, too!"

"It does sound that way," Joan acknowledged reluctantly, "but her Mother had promised her the ring so I suppose she felt that it really belonged to her. Still, her conscience is pricking her—you can read that between the lines."

"That paragraph you just read tells us three things about the girl," Gail summed up. "We know she can't be eighteen else she would have received the ring, her Mother must be dead, and she isn't on the best terms with her father."

"Maybe he's a regular old tyrant," Bob commented. "In that case I'd not blame her for skipping out."

"We'll never get to the end unless you quit interrupting," Joan protested, impatient to go on with the reading. "Don't you want to hear her name?"

"Of course," Gail said eagerly.

"Tonight at dinner Father seemed less stern than usual, more like he was before Mother died," Joan read in a low, rich voice. "'When he placed his hand on my shoulder for an instant and said: 'Virginia, I don't mean to make you so unhappy,' I nearly broke down and disclosed my plans.'"

"Virginia!" Gail exclaimed, forgetting that she had intended not to interrupt. "Why, it's a pretty name too. Joan, tell us her surname."

"I can't because I haven't learned it myself."

"And what terrible thing is her father trying to make her do?" Gail speculated. "It must be something dreadful to force the poor thing to run away from home."

"Oh, I don't know," Bob cut in. He liked to take the opposite side for the sake of an argument. "Girls get funny notions sometimes. Maybe her father wasn't such

a tyrant after all. He wouldn't have told Virginia he didn't mean to be unkind unless he had some feeling for her. He really was concerned about her happiness."

"There's a great deal more to read," Joan said impatiently. "Listen to this:

" 'I fear it is too late to change my plans now. The letter has been sent, and my trunk has been taken secretly aboard *The Breneman*. ' "

"Did you catch that word 'secretly'?" Gail demanded. "That proves she's running away. Perhaps the girl Mrs. Hodges saw on the boat was Virginia."

"It may have been," Joan agreed. "You remember Mrs. Hodges said the girl seemed reluctant to give any information about herself."

"That would be natural if she were running away from home," Gail reasoned. "I wonder what Virginia meant by saying that the letter had been sent. What letter?"

Without attempting to answer the question, Joan turned again to the sheet of paper in her hand. As she read, her voice took on a deeper, more dramatic tone.

" 'Tonight, directly after Father leaves the house at the usual hour, I shall take my suitcase and steal quietly on board *The Breneman*. I have written D— telling him to meet me at Miami when the ship docks. The time has been too short for a reply but he will not fail me, I know. For many weeks he has urged me to come but I have hesitated to leave Father. Now matters have arrived at a crisis. Either I must run away or give in to Father's unreasonable wishes. In my last letter to D— I sent him half of the ring. He will understand its significance. ' "

"She must mean the missing part of the twin ring!" Gail chortled, fairly hugging herself in delight.

"Why does she go in so strong for the alphabet," Bob puzzled. "Who is this mysterious—D—?"

"Perhaps Virginia was afraid to write out his full name for fear someone might find the diary," Gail suggested.

Joan shook her head doubtfully. She could not agree with this theory.

"It might have been for that reason, only Virginia mentions Miami and *The Breneman*, and before she finishes, she gives still another name. No, I'd quicker think she had fallen into the habit of using the letter instead of the name—possibly because it took less time to write."

"It was an unfortunate habit," Bob observed. "If she'd given the full name perhaps we could have traced her relatives."

"I never can understand why someone didn't inquire for the trunk," Gail remarked, drawing meaningless pictures in the sand. "Of course, if no one knew she was on the boat, that might explain it. But at any rate, we're learning considerable about Virginia. We know her home was in Bermuda because *The Breneman* sailed from there. That would lead us to suppose she was English."

"She could have been an American," Joan commented thoughtfully. "I should have asked Mrs. Hodges if the girl she met was English, but it didn't occur to me at the time."

"The diary reads like a detective story," Gail went on enthusiastically. "Now what I want to know is this: What did Virginia mean when she wrote that D— would understand the significance of the gimmal ring?"

"That's easy," Bob answered promptly. "Joan told us that twin rings formerly were used to pledge an engagement. Now it strikes me that this particular ring may have been in Virginia's family for a long time. She must

have known its history and possibly intended to use it for her own engagement ring when the time came."

"But these days girls don't furnish the engagement ring," Joan observed with a troubled frown. "We can't get around that. And the girl must have been very young to have been engaged."

"It's usually the young ones who run off and elope," Bob responded wisely. "Perhaps Virginia wasn't bothered by the modern conventions. Or it may have been a family custom to use this particular gimmel ring for the eldest daughter's betrothal. With so much tradition behind it, such a conclusion seems logical to me."

"Then your theory is that Virginia sent half of the gimmel ring to this mysterious Mr. D— as a pledge that she intended to marry him when she reached the United States?" Gail questioned doubtfully.

"It sounds far fetched, I'll admit, but that's just what I think."

Gail's face drew into tight lines. She said with conviction: "Well, if Virginia took a ring that didn't really belong to her and sent one of the twin circles to someone else, I don't think she did right at all!"

"Of course she didn't," Joan agreed instantly, "but everyone makes mistakes of judgment. We must try to look at it from her standpoint. She felt that the ring was hers."

"I'll reserve my opinion until later," Gail said. "Go on and read the rest. We may hear more about the twin rings."

"The next is something of a surprise," Joan announced impressively. "If you can make anything of it, you're more clever than I. Here it is:

"'How I should enjoy seeing Frorie's face tomorrow when he learns that I have gone.'"

"What can she mean by that?" Gail murmured in bewilderment as Joan paused. "Who is Frorie? Surely not her father."

"I don't believe she refers to her father," Joan said slowly.

"Frorie might be a surname," Bob offered. "I never heard of anyone having that for a first name, though they tag folks with worse ones sometimes."

"Whoever he is, it's clear Virginia has precious little time for him," Joan commented, folding the sheet of paper.

"Perhaps the next notation will explain," Bob said. "Read on, Joan."

"I can't. That's the end of the page."

"It would be," Gail groaned. "Just when we were about to learn something worth while. It's positively devastating! Joan, don't tell me that's all there is."

"No, there are several more pages to the diary, but it was so late last night I didn't dare sit up another minute. I nearly ruined my eyes as it was to say nothing of Mrs. Huston's electric bill."

"I should have helped you," Gail said contritely. "I shall from now on. Let's read the remainder of the diary this afternoon."

"It will take more than one afternoon unless we dig it out faster than I did last night. You have to guess at so many words."

"Where do I come in?" Bob complained good-naturedly. "I'm as much interested in this Bermuda romance as you girls are."

"You weren't at first," Gail reminded him.

Joan looked troubled, then a smile flashed over her face.

"Why, Bob, you're on duty all afternoon and won't

have time to read the diary. Gail and I can write it all out, and tomorrow morning after our swim report to you. That way, you'll not have long to wait."

"All right," Bob gave in graciously. He did not really want the diary. "It's barely possible I may have some information to contribute myself by that time."

Pressed for an explanation, he maintained a mysterious silence, and would only grin in a most provoking way. Teasing did no good at all so the girls finally gathered up their belongings and scurried up the path to Pirate Inn for a belated breakfast.

A STEP FORWARD

BOB BARTLEY whistled a cheerful tune as he sauntered leisurely across the beach. Idly, he paused to watch the flight of a fat pelican overhead and then walking on a few steps farther reached down to pick up a curious shell which had been washed up by the waves.

A shout broke in upon his reverie. From far up the beach, Joan and Gail were calling his name. He quickened his step.

"Well, I see you're right on the dot," he greeted as they rushed up, breathless from running. "I thought you might not keep the appointment this morning."

"And why shouldn't we keep it?" Gail questioned in surprise.

Bob took a folded newspaper from the pocket of his bathrobe and offered it to the girls. He indicated a story on the front page.

"I see that Jimmy Rickenberg, the famous Ace is flying here today from Miami. He's scheduled to land at the beach around nine o'clock. I half suspected that you girls would go to the landing port to watch him come in."

Joan and Gail read the newspaper account with interest.

"We didn't see the story," Gail admitted. "I should like to see Rickenberg. They say he was one of the most daring fliers in the World War. Are you going, Bob?"

"I'd like to, but I can't. I'm scheduled to guard the

beach beginning at nine. No reason why you girls can't go though."

"Except that this is the morning Joan intended to start training for the Turkill Isle swim," Gail said regretfully. "And there's the diary to be read! We have so many interesting things to tell you, Bob."

"And I want to hear them too." The life-guard glanced at his wrist watch. "It's still early. If we hurry, we'll have time for our swim and a little talk about the mystery before nine o'clock. As a rule, things never come off at the scheduled time. Rickenberg may be late getting in."

"Let's start reading the diary right away," Joan urged.

"Did you learn anything worth while?" Bob inquired.

"Did we?" Gail answered with a mischievous smile. "Just wait until you hear! We didn't get at the diary yesterday afternoon due to various delays. But we sat up half the night and would have been at it yet if Aunt Ella hadn't chased us off to bed."

"I have a little news of my own," Bob mentioned in a casual tone.

"What is it?" Joan demanded with quickening interest. "Tell us.

Bob shook his head.

"Work before pleasure. If we begin 'gimmaling' now, we'll forget all about the swimming practice."

"Bob is an awful slave driver," Gail complained.

Joan accepted her fate in silence.

Together the three splashed out into the shallow water.

They swam about for a few minutes, splashing a great deal of water and trying to duck one another. The girls were beginning to have fun riding the waves in toward shore when Bob summoned them to work. In the shallow water he gave them a brief but intensive leg-kick drill

and offered constructive criticisms regarding their crawl strokes.

"Don't bother with me," Gail pleaded, for she did not enjoy routine practice. "I'll just paddle around."

"That's what you've been doing for the past two years," Bob told her severely. "Now that you've joined my little class, you're scheduled for work."

In the shallow water, with her hands resting on the sandy bottom, Gail was set to the task of perfecting a leg kick which had always given her trouble. To the count of one-two-three, one-two-three, her legs thrashed up and down, heels breaking the surface of the water, knees rigid, toes pointed inward. Gail kept it up faithfully for a time, but observing that Bob had taken his eye from her, she flopped over on her back and permitted a friendly wave to deposit her on the beach.

Bob was teaching Joan the finer points of the arm stroke.

"You must learn relaxation," he told her. "A slow, powerful stroke is the thing for a long swim. Learn to rest."

"Now that is something I could do," Gail thought, stretching herself out on the warm sand.

She had just begun to feel wonderfully comfortable when Bob came and routed her out. His latest torture took the form of a quarter-mile swim.

"I think I'll stay right here and watch," Gail groaned. "In case one of you drown, you'd want someone to report to the Coast Guard station."

"You're coming along, else you'll not hear a word about my contribution to the mystery," Bob said firmly.

He set the pace for the quarter-mile swim. Joan and Gail swam on either side of him, trying to time their strokes with his. It was not easy for Bob's powerful

muscles sent him gliding effortlessly through the water and his one stroke was easily worth two of theirs. Gail never could catch the rhythm, but Joan, after the first few minutes, found her stroke lengthening out until her arms dipped in unison with Bob's. She was elated at the pleasant sensation of gliding along with unusual ease and smoothness.

Occasionally Bob raised his head to offer a word of praise or criticism, but for the most part they swam in silence. Within a few minutes they were back at the beach again, flushed and warm, slightly out of breath, but well satisfied with the morning's work-out.

"Not half bad for the first time," Bob commented as the girls flung themselves flat upon their backs to rest. "After you've worked up your endurance we'll swim to Turkill Isle and back."

"When that occasion arrives, I'll develop a case of pneumonia or something," Gail predicted darkly. "I wasn't built for long distance swimming."

Suddenly Joan sat upright in the sand, indicating, with a nod of her head, a bather far up the beach.

"Isn't that Margery Annas?" she asked.

"Looks like her," Bob agreed indifferently. "She's been watching us from the diving platform most of the time we were practicing."

"She practices a great deal herself, I imagine."

"On the contrary, she trains spasmodically," the guard informed them. "That's one reason why I never wanted to coach her. I don't like people who won't work."

"She must know by this time that Joan means to enter the race," Gail observed.

"Yes, she came around to me yesterday to ask if it were true. The news didn't set very well with her."

"Margery has her heart set on winning our locket,"

Gail commented feelingly. "If I remember correctly she was the one who first suggested to Aunt Ella that it be offered instead of the usual loving cup. I suppose it's selfish of me, but knowing what I do, I almost wish Aunt Ella hadn't agreed to it."

Bob and Joan assented. They realized that they too were developing an attachment for the trinket.

"We must tell Mrs. Huston all about the twin ring before the race comes off," Bob said soberly. "I guess there's no harm in keeping what we know a secret for awhile yet, but we mustn't wait too long."

There was a pause in the conversation as the three sat staring out across the bay, each engrossed with his own thoughts. Joan was absently watching Margery Annas far up the beach when Bob said suddenly:

"Well, are we sufficiently rested to hear about the diary?"

"We want to learn what you have to report first," Joan shot back.

"My information is mostly of a negative character," Bob responded. "Last night I went through old newspaper files at the library."

"What were you searching for?" Joan questioned curiously. "Accounts of the hurricane?"

"Yes, particularly the stories dealing with the wreck of *The Breneman*."

"We should have thought of that before," Gail declared.

Bob remarked that he was glad they had left something for him to discover. "Not that it's very much. A great deal has been written about the wreck, although very little of interest to us."

"But you did learn something," Gail insisted.

Bob eyed his listeners keenly as he dropped his little bombshell.

"Well, I came across the passenger list."

"You did!" Joan sat upright. "Why, that's important, Bob. You must have learned Virginia's last name."

Bob made a negative gesture. "No, that's the funny part of it. Her name wasn't listed at all. Among all those passengers there wasn't a single person by the name of Virginia."

"We know she was on the boat," Gail said in a puzzled tone.

"We're not absolutely certain," Bob corrected. "The girl Mrs. Hodges met may have been Virginia and it may have been some other person. The diary told us that she was running away from home because her father was forcing her to do something against her will. We do know that she took the gimmal ring and that she engaged passage on *The Breneman*, but we can't be certain she actually went aboard."

Wise glances were exchanged by Joan and Gail.

"We know it, Bob," the latter said, "but of course, we have an unfair advantage of you. We learned a number of interesting things from reading on in the diary. But what were you saying?"

"I've told about everything, and as I mentioned, my information is mostly negative. The passenger list was a disappointment. But one thing impressed me as significant. Every paper I read mentioned that all passengers of *The Breneman* were taken off safely, yet in the account written a few days after the wreck I found this passenger list which was supposed to be complete—and after the name of Freda Doraine there appeared the caption—'missing'."

"Let me get this straight," Joan said quickly. "In the

stories of the disaster nothing was said about this girl being missing?"

"Not a word. The earlier stories all emphatically stated that no lives had been lost. Those written a day or so after the storm were very brief and the matter wasn't mentioned."

"Perhaps the paper which carried Freda Doraine's name made a mistake," Gail suggested.

"I'd be more inclined to think it was the only one that was correct," Bob replied. "The steamship officials naturally wouldn't care to have it put out that a passenger had been lost—perhaps through inefficiency of ship's officers."

"It seems a reasonable guess that in some manner a girl passenger mysteriously vanished," Joan said thoughtfully. "Whether she was swept overboard without being seen, as Mrs. Hodges seems to think, or whether she disappeared after the rescue, it's hard to tell."

"But who is Freda Doraine?" Gail asked, puzzled. "What connection can she have with our story?"

Bob gazed steadily at the girls for an instant and then remarked in an off-hand manner:

"Well, I thought possibly our little friend, Virginia, shipped under a different name."

Joan and Gail exchanged startled glances. The deduction appeared so obvious that they felt a little stupid because they had not made it themselves.

"Why, of course!" Gail cried. "That fits in with what we've learned. Oh, isn't all this tantalizing!"

"It does get under your skin," Bob admitted, grinning. "And I thought mine was so tough and sunburned that nothing could affect it!"

The girls were far too excited to be in the mood for joking. They fired rapid questions at Bob but he had told them all there was to tell and could add nothing of im-

portance. He suggested that it was their turn to relate their latest findings in the diary.

Joan fished the tiny volume from the pocket of her robe, offering it to him for inspection.

"We wrote everything down on a sheet of paper," she explained. "We can read it faster that way."

"Let's see, where did we leave off?" Bob said ruminatively, curiously turning through the pages of the diary. "Oh, I remember. Virginia had just remarked that Frorie would be one surprised lad when he learned that she had run away."

"She drops him from the picture for a little while," Joan volunteered, studying her scribbled notes. "The next entry appears to have been written the following morning, although no date is given. I'll read what she has to say:

" 'There is no turning back. It is done! I have left Bermuda, perhaps forever. This morning we are far out at sea. The day is bright and pleasant but the vessel has an uncomfortable roll which seems rather unusual since there is no wind. I shall remain quietly in my deck chair and perhaps shall feel better after I have accustomed myself to the difficult motion.' "

"Seasick!" Bob grinned. "Poor kid. Now I do feel sorry for her."

" 'I longed with all my heart to say good-bye to Father last night. I dared not even leave a note lest he cable the Miami authorities and have them hold me when the ship touches there. I am truly sorry to go against his wishes but I never could have brought myself to do as he asked. He does not know Frorie as I do.' "

"The plot thickens," Bob remarked. "Frorie seems to have had a finger in the pie."

" 'My one regret,' Joan read on, " 'is that I took the

twin ring even though it is mine by right. I realize now that it was a grave mistake. Had I not acted upon a sudden whim I am certain I should never have yielded to the temptation. A queer feeling has obsessed me since the day I sent the inside disc of the ring to D—. Something warns me that the ring no longer is an omen of good fortune and happiness. Perhaps in wrongfully taking it I shall bring misfortune upon myself and those whom I love.' "

"Virginia seems to be superstitious," Bob commented, smiling. "All that about good and bad omens is nonsense."

"If Virginia did wrong in taking the ring," Joan said in a low voice, "I'm sure her conscience is punishing her enough. Somehow, I feel that if only she'd stayed with her father and talked everything over with him, he'd have understood her feelings. Listen to what she writes next:

"'If only I could return the ring! Last night I did not sleep for thinking of what I have done. I have decided that as soon as I can secure the inner disc of the ring from D— I will send it back to Father. Perhaps then he will forgive me for running away. I am confident that once he really knows D— as I do, he will no longer be opposed to him. It is only because he is without means and an American—"

"Go on," Bob urged as Joan paused for breath.

"That's the end of the entry. Virginia broke off and didn't finish what she was writing. When she picks up the thread of the story again, she doesn't finish the sentence either. Now get ready for the surprise!"

"'A terrible thing has happened. Nicholas is aboard. I saw him this afternoon while I was sitting on deck writing in my little journal. He looked hard at me, but I

ducked my head and could not tell if he recognized me. Frorie once mentioned that his brother makes occasional business trips to the States but only an unkind fate could have caused him to sail upon this same vessel.' "

"Isn't this delicious?" Gail demanded with a tiny shiver of delight. "Joan and I nearly shot through the ceiling when we read that last night."

"Is there more?"

"Yes," Joan told him, and it's the best yet.

"I'm terribly frightened. If Nicholas recognizes me all is lost!"

"And that's as far as we got," Gail announced. "Aunt Ella rapped on the door to inquire why we were sitting up so late. We were afraid she'd come in to find out so we popped into bed like two streaks of lightning."

"Well, I wish you could have chosen a less dramatic place to break off," Bob complained good-naturedly. "I think it's my turn to keep the diary."

Gail and Joan regarded him aghast. They could not bear to give up the little journal. Bob knew it too, and was only teasing, but the girls took him seriously.

"You won't have time to read it," Gail protested. "Not with all your life-guarding duties. Don't you think Joan and I had better keep it and report our findings tomorrow morning?"

"Oh, all right," Bob pretended to give in. "If I had it here on the beach, I might let some poor fellow drown."

It was not yet nine o'clock, but Gail suddenly sprang to her feet, listening intently. She could distinguish the faint drone of an airplane engine.

Bob was the first to sight the amphibian far out over the water.

"It must be Rickenberg," he declared, shading his eyes for a better view. "He's arriving ahead of schedule."

Joan and Gail hastily wrapped their robes tightly about them, gathering up their belongings.

"We'll have to run if we make it," Gail flung over her shoulder as they raced down the beach. "See you tomorrow, Bob."

BAFFLED

JOAN and Gail pushed their way to the front of the group of spectators who had gathered at the waterfront port to witness the arrival of the amphibian. Among the crowd they noticed many friends and acquaintances. Gail nudged her friend to direct attention toward Mr. Balerton who stood somewhat apart from the others. She was surprised to see him there, although she could not have explained why. Certainly he had a perfect right to be at the airport. It was only that he mingled so seldom with the crowd or appeared interested in the common events of community life.

The plane which had circled the city was now observed coming toward the landing field. It glided easily down, stalled a few feet from the earth and made a perfect three point landing.

A loud welcoming cheer went up from the crowd. The pilot, readily recognized from his pictures as the famous Jimmy Rickenberg, waved good-naturedly to the spectators.

As he climbed from the cockpit, the official reception committee moved forward in a body to welcome him to Crystal Beach. The flier acknowledged their greetings perfunctorily, his eye roving over the crowd. His face suddenly lighted and with a cry of pleasure he rushed forward to grasp a man by the hand.

"Well, if it isn't my old friend, Balerton! I haven't set eyes on you since we flew together in France!"

Gail and Joan stared in amazement as did many of the other spectators. No one had known that Mr. Balerton was acquainted with such a noted personage as Jimmy Rickenberg, much less dreamed that he too had served as a flier in the war.

"Well, did you ever," Gail murmured, as they saw the two men talking animatedly together. "I guess there's a great deal we don't know about that man!"

Jimmy Rickenberg had turned again to the committee, and the girls, pressing a little closer, heard him say: "Never mind about providing entertainment for me while I'm here. If you don't mind, I'll stay with my old friend Balerton."

Presently the two men pushed their way through the crowd, and arm in arm, vanished down the street, leaving a group of bewildered and disappointed spectators behind.

"You could knock me over with a feather," Gail observed to her friend as they turned to leave. "Imagine Mr. Balerton living here all this while and never once mentioning to anyone that he was a flier! He's the queerest man I ever knew."

That afternoon from the veranda of Pirate Inn, they saw the amphibian flying low over the bay with two occupants in the cockpit. Gail trained Mrs. Huston's field-glass upon the plane and while the figures remained somewhat indistinct, she was convinced that one of the men was Mr. Balerton.

"He's in the rear seat," she informed, offering the glass to Joan, "and if I'm not mistaken that's where the pilot usually sits. Imagine Mr. Balerton flying a plane! Bob won't believe it when we tell him."

The girls brought the diary out upon the veranda and tried to decipher the few remaining pages, but with an

amphibian motor droning over their heads every little while it was impossible to concentrate. That evening the newspaper carried a long account of Rickenberg's arrival in Crystal Beach, together with an interview from him in which he made glowing references to Mr. Balerton's war time record. Gail carefully cut out the article, pasting it in a scrap book.

Later that night the girls worked diligently over the diary, hoping to make up for lost time and have the last entry puzzled out before their next meeting with Bob. However, Gail did not feel well, and Joan, noticing that her friend seemed to have a slight fever, suggested that they postpone the work.

They were destined not to keep their appointment with Bob the next morning. Over night Gail was stricken with a severe cold which settled in her lungs. In vain she protested to her aunt that a sunning on the beach would do her no harm. Mrs. Huston remained adamant, insisting that Gail not only remain indoors but that she spend the greater part of the next three days in bed.

"Oh, this is awful," Gail bemoaned in private to her chum. "I'll miss seeing Jimmy Rickenberg take off for the North. And what's worse, our mystery is going to suffer!"

She gallantly urged Joan to carry on their investigation without her and to work upon the diary with Bob, but this Joan refused to do. At first she remained at Gail's bedside and whenever they were alone for a few minutes they brought out the diary from beneath the pillow, secreting it at the sound of footsteps.

Unwittingly, Mrs. Huston soon put an end to this stolen pleasure. Fearing that Joan might contract the cold and feeling that she had permitted her to spend far too much time in the sickroom, she arranged with Gail's

many friends to invite her away. They called to take her to picture shows, motoring and golfing.

Gail, with far too much leisure time on her hands, might have managed to work on the diary by herself, save that Mrs. Huston, feeling that it was unfair to deprive her niece of her friend without furnishing companionship in return, spent hours at a time in the sick-room. Gail improved the monotony as best she could by directing the conversation to the subject of Bermuda. Mrs. Huston had spent a very pleasant vacation upon the little coral island and was delighted to recount her experiences, although she wondered a little at Gail's sudden interest. She described in glowing terms the luxurious vegetation, the brilliant flowers, the long stretches of beach, and gave a vivid picture of the fine homes with their massive stone walls which enclosed charming gardens.

"Virginia must have lived in a place such as that," Gail mused dreamily.

Under Mrs. Huston's excellent care, she made such rapid improvement that Joan was permitted to move her belongings back into the bedroom at the end of the third day. The next afternoon the girls unearthed the diary and jubilantly set to work on their postponed task.

Gail was up for breakfast the following morning and appeared so much stronger that Mrs. Huston said she might go for a walk if she wished. The girls set off at a dignified pace, but the moment they could no longer be seen from Mrs. Huston's sitting room window, they broke into a run, heading straight for the beach.

"Aunt Ella is downright fussy about colds," Gail remarked with a grimace. "She's always afraid pneumonia or worse will set in. Just think of all the precious time we've wasted. What will Bob think?"

They found him on duty, but even though the beach was crowded, he managed to talk with them while keeping a vigilant eye upon the bathers.

"Say, what became of Nicholas?" he began indignantly as they greeted him. "After this, I guess I'll have to keep the diary."

"Oh, so much has happened in the last four days," Gail sighed. "We've been as anxious to get here as you have to see us. If you'd been in bed for three days eating nothing but ammonium chloride tablets and thin soups, you wouldn't blame me."

"I didn't know you were sick, Gail. I'd have sent you a bunch of posies if I'd known. Poor kid, you still look a little pale."

"If I do, it's from excitement. We've finished the diary at last, and we have a few surprises. Whoppers!"

"I have some news of my own," Bob countered. "Did you know that David Balerton was a World War flier? It seems he's an old pal of this Jimmy Rickenberg. Before Rickenberg left town he took Balerton up in his plane and with our modest friend at the controls, they did loops and figure eights and I don't know what all."

"Oh, we're far ahead of you," Gail returned. "We saw Rickenberg step from his plane and walk right over to Mr. Balerton and shake his hand."

"The town is still talking about it," Bob chuckled. "You'd think all the notoriety might go to Balerton's head, but this morning I saw him walking along the beach. He spoke just as if nothing unusual had happened."

"He's a queer one," Gail returned. "You know, I wonder if some of his strange actions might not be explained by the fact that he was in the war?"

Bob laughed at such a theory.

"I doubt it, Gail. He's that way by nature—just a quiet, modest sort of chap who minds his own business. I like him."

"Oh, we all do," Gail said hastily, fearing that her words had created a wrong impression. "I'm very proud to have him for a dramatic coach. I think I'll study harder from now on."

"What were you saying about the diary?" Bob reminded her. "Tell me the latest surprise."

"We can't tell you here," Gail protested. "When will you be free?"

Bob consulted his watch. "My relief shows up in ten minutes. I could leave now if it weren't for that man out there who's bent upon drowning himself."

The girls turned to stare at the elderly gentleman who had attracted Bob's attention. Although it was apparent that he could not swim, he had waded out into the water nearly to shoulder depth. A strong wave easily could sweep him from his feet.

Bob arose quickly from the sand, intending to call out a warning. He was too late.

"There he goes!" he muttered. "I knew it!"

Even as he spoke, the girls saw a high wave strike the man, sweeping him off his feet. Down he went, sputtering and plunging wildly about.

Bob dropped his wrist watch into Joan's lap, ran across the sand, dived, and with a dozen powerful strokes approached the struggling man from the rear. His right hand shot out and hooked the man neatly under the chin, raising him to a horizontal position on his back. Bob took no unnecessary chances with an excited victim. His left arm went across the man's chest and under his armpit, holding him in a vise-like grip from which he could not free himself. In this fashion, with the man riding

say I think she was washed overboard," Bob declared. Then seeing that his opinion was highly distasteful to the girls, he added more hopefully: "But then, I'm a confirmed pessimist. Read on, Joan."

"How glad I shall be when we reach port. This journey has been horrible and I am besieged with a thousand doubts and fears. It has been nearly a year since last I saw D— and though his letters have been affectionate and kind, I cannot be certain that his feeling for me has not changed. I know now that I should have waited until I received an answer to my last letter, but time was so short! If only Father had given his consent to our marriage in Bermuda, everything would have turned out so differently.

"It is the ring which makes me feel so despondent. I had no right to send one of the twin bands to D— for it was not mine to send. I no longer can bear to wear the remaining disc, feeling that I took it dishonestly from Father. I have placed it in a locket which I shall keep in the secret compartment of my trunk. As soon as D— and I are married in Miami, I shall send both halves of the ring back to Father and beg his forgiveness.' "

"Things begin to clear up a bit," Bob interposed as Joan paused for breath. "We weren't far off in most of our guesses either."

"It gets more exciting every minute," Gail said, "but it's sort of sad too. Virginia must have known her friend in Bermuda but they were forced to part when Virginia's father opposed the match. I suppose the man came on to the States, probably Miami. They must have kept in constant touch with letters. Then on the spur of the moment when things got hard at home, Virginia decided to run away and marry him, and let the feathers fly where they would!"

"Well, she certainly stirred up things," Bob commented. "Runaway marriages seldom pan out."

"Listen to the sage!" Joan teased, then added seriously. "I have a theory to offer. It's my guess that Frorie wanted to marry Virginia himself and that her father favored the match. Perhaps he was a wealthy suitor."

"Sounds reasonable," Bob agreed.

"I'm glad Virginia chose the American," Gail said feelingly. "If his picture is the one in the locket, I'm sure he must be nice."

"Speaking of that picture," Joan cut in, "doesn't it remind you of someone?"

Bob and Gail could think of no person of their acquaintance who remotely resembled the photograph. Nor could Joan definitely tie it up with anyone.

"I suppose it's my imagination," she acknowledged, "only I keep thinking to myself, 'I've seen that man somewhere'—if only I could recall where!"

"We've spent so much time mooning over Virginia's story that the characters are becoming real to us," Gail suggested. "Perhaps you never saw him at all and your subconscious mind just played you a trick."

Joan smiled, allowing the matter to pass. However, she was not converted to her friend's psychology. Bob urged her to go on with the reading of the diary. She began again in a low, clear voice:

"It was so stuffy in my cabin that I went on deck for a few minutes this morning, watching carefully lest I meet Nicholas. Few passengers were out as the sea was unpleasantly rough. This seems most strange, for scarcely a breath of air is stirring. I spoke of it to the captain who said that he fears we shall run into a severe storm before we reach Miami. Hurricane warnings have

been sent by radio to all vessels, but doubtlessly they are exaggerated. The sky is only partially overcast.' "

"Go on," Bob urged as Joan paused.

"There's only one more entry. It's very brief, and the most exciting of all. Here it is:

" 'The hurricane is upon us! It is frightful! All passengers have been ordered to remain in their cabins. We are near the coast, I believe, and making for the closest port. Each moment I fear will be our last. I am—' "

"And that's all there is," Gail informed tensely as Joan finished. "Virginia broke off at that point and never wrote another word. A great blot of ink spilled over the page and the handwriting was so shaky and indistinct we scarcely could read it."

"We know the rest," Bob said quietly. "*The Breneman* was wrecked."

Gail and Joan agreed unhappily. For some minutes the three sat staring moodily out across the bay. Virginia and her troubles had become very real to them.

"Well, it looks as if we're at the end of our rope," Gail said at length. "There's no way of ever finding out what became of Virginia."

Bob started to speak, but Joan cut him short.

"Bob Bartley, don't you dare suggest again that she was washed overboard! Oh, I almost wish we had never started this thing. It's so hard to leave it unsolved."

"We've only started to work it out," Bob returned with surprising optimism. "This is the first real test of our abilities."

"Well, for the moment I'm stumped," Joan returned gloomily. "But perhaps one of us will think of something."

"And while we're waiting for that something to turn up," Bob added as the three arose to leave, "it's just as

well to devote a little time to swimming. Remember, the race is only a few weeks away. And unless Mrs. Huston decides to the contrary, the twin ring and the locket remain as the coveted prize!"

A QUESTION EVADED

THE next few days passed swiftly for Gail and Joan. Each morning at eight o'clock they met Bob on the beach and for an hour practiced their crawl strokes under his tutelage. Joan's progress was not spectacular but steady. Gradually, she found her stroke smoothing out; there was no wasted effort, no useless movement. She swam increasing distances with ease.

Twice she and Bob made the long swim to Turkill Isle and return. Upon these occasions Gail accompanied them in a row-boat, declaring that her muscle and ambition were not equal to the trip. Bob seldom timed Joan with a stop-watch, but he expressed himself as well satisfied with her progress.

Unavoidably, the three occasionally met Margery Annas who likewise had gone into serious training for the coming race. Either she ignored their presence on the beach or spoke so coldly that there could be no doubt as to her attitude concerning Joan's entry.

One morning Bob pointed out a brawny man of middle age, slightly bald, wearing a striped sweater and white duck trousers, remarking that he was Margery's official trainer from the city. They saw a great deal of him in the following days and secretly were amused at the airs he affected upon the beach.

"Do you think he's much of a trainer?" Gail questioned Bob, her final authority upon matters nautical. "He looks like a big, chesty bluff to me!"

Bob merely shrugged, refusing to be pinned down to such a definite statement.

"Some folks who aren't especially good swimmers sometimes make excellent instructors," he told her. "I haven't seen enough of this man's work yet to judge him."

The three tried not to appear too interested in the work-outs which the city trainer gave Margery but since they frequently were in the water at the same hour, it was impossible not to make mental notes regarding his general technique. He took his work very seriously, keeping Margery in the water several hours daily. Bob believed in hard work too, but he permitted Joan relatively easy work-outs.

"Am I practicing enough?" she asked him one morning after they had observed Margery come in from a long, hard swim.

"There's such a thing as overdoing it, Joan. I can't see any sense in killing one's self to win a race."

"Nor can I. I want to win that locket dreadfully, but not at the expense of all our good times. I don't want swimming to become a career."

The morning training hour was more pleasure than work. Usually after Joan finished her swim, they all sat on the beach sunning themselves and reviewing what they had gleaned concerning the gimmal ring, for while they had made no recent progress in solving the mystery, they had not lost interest.

In the hope of discovering some overlooked clue, Gail and Joan reread every page of the diary. The notations written by Virginia before she had planned her trip aboard *The Breneman* were of slight interest.

They did find one reference which lent color to their theory that Frorie had been forcing unwilling attentions

upon the English girl. The particular passage supplied the information that he had taken Virginia to the theater and that the evening had been most distasteful.

Two nights each week Gail attended play rehearsals. Usually Joan accompanied her to the school auditorium and it was amusing to see how worshipfully the young dramatic coach was regarded by his charges. Since learning that he had served as a flier in the War, they hung upon his every word, working like Trojans to make the play a success.

"If I ever have the opportunity, I mean to question Mr. Balerton about twin rings," Joan remarked to her friend. "I'm sure he could tell me something about them."

"Why don't you?" Gail encouraged, for she thought the experiment might prove amusing. "If you learn anything personal from that man, you'll establish a record for yourself."

"Rings aren't a personal subject, Gail. He seems to be well versed in jewelry lore. Why shouldn't he answer my questions?"

"Oh, probably he will. Only no one has been able to learn anything about his war record. Whenever the subject is brought up, he shifts to another one."

"Oh, that's just his modesty," Joan returned. "He surely can't object to talking about rings. From what he said that night at play rehearsal I'm sure he's gone deeply into the subject."

"Well, it won't do any harm to try," Gail smiled.

Joan determined to draw Mr. Balerton into conversation at the first opportunity. However, the rehearsals were attended with considerable confusion and usually the dramatic teacher was surrounded by a group of boys and girls who besieged him with questions of their own.

Joan began to think that she would never be able to

corner him alone. And then one evening as she sat near the front of the auditorium listening to the third act for the tenth time, he took a seat beside her.

"Oh, Mr. Balerton," she began timidly, as a scene came to a merciful end, "I'm tremendously interested in old rings. From something you said the other evening, I thought perhaps you could tell me about them."

To her relief, the man smiled pleasantly.

"Old rings? Well, I do know a little about certain types. In what kind are you especially interested?"

"In gimmals."

Mr. Balerton seemed to doubt that he had heard correctly.

"Gimmals?" he repeated.

"Yes, twin rings, you know. Can't you tell me something about the lore connected with them?"

"You want to know about twin rings?" Mr. Balerton murmured. "Miss Bernell, if you don't mind, I'd rather not—oh, pardon me, some one is calling."

With an alacrity which was almost flight, he hastily arose and hurried away to answer a summons to the telephone. Joan stared after him in disappointment. She knew she would never have a similar opportunity.

"You were right," she told Gail later when they were walking home together. "He's the most elusive young man I ever saw. I felt just as though he were going to say something important about gimmal rings when he was called to the phone. And he looked so relieved! I can't understand it at all."

"I warned you not to be surprised at anything that man does or says," Gail responded with a laugh. "I knew you'd have no luck for he hates anything with a question mark attached at the end. Are you trying again?"

"Oh, I suppose not. It does make me provoked though. I don't like to give up on such a simple matter."

It was disheartening to feel that as far as the twin ring was concerned they were at a standstill. The locket which remained in its leather case at Pirate Inn was a constant reminder of their failure in unraveling its history. In sheer desperation, the girls turned their energies to swimming but Virginia's story had so intrigued their fancy that they could not consign it to the limbo of forgotten things.

And then one morning a week later, when they were nearly ready to admit failure, Bob startled them with an announcement that he had something new to report.

"I did a little more research yesterday," he informed. "What I learned isn't very significant though."

"Do tell us," Gail commanded. "Every little bit counts and lately we've made no progress at all."

"Well, I went through those old newspaper accounts of the disaster again. I took a second look at the passenger list of *The Breneman*. I discovered there was a man on board by the name of Nicholas—Nicholas Caldwell."

"Caldwell!" Joan exclaimed, highly elated. "So that's his last name!"

"And Caldwell must be Frorie's surname too," Gail added eagerly, "for we know they were brothers."

"Yes," Bob agreed, "unless there happened to be two passengers aboard by the name of Nicholas. One was listed as N. W. Graves but of course we can't tell what the first initial stands for. It might be Nicholas or it could be Nebuchadnezzar."

"It could be," Joan laughed, "but the chances are it's neither. Unless we find evidence to the contrary let's assume that Nicholas Caldwell is the Nicholas mentioned in the diary. What else did you learn, Bob?"

"That's all. You see it doesn't help in the least."

The girls were disappointed at such slim findings but they tried to take a cheerful attitude.

"You never can tell," Gail returned. "Facts that seem unimportant now may turn out to have significance later. If only we knew Virginia's last name! Then we'd have something. We could communicate with her father or some of her relatives."

Joan nodded thoughtfully.

"You know, I can't help feeling sorry for that poor old gentleman over there in Bermuda. I imagine he never knew what became of his daughter. I'm sure he must have cared deeply for her in spite of their misunderstanding."

"It's a pity things turned out so badly," Gail agreed soberly.

"Virginia's father may be dead by this time," Bob said quietly. "The hurricane was in 1926. That wasn't so long ago, but if he were an old man—" his voice trailed off.

"He never knew how Virginia felt about everything," Gail remarked after a long period of silence. "He never learned that she intended to return the ring."

"I wish in some way we could find out if he is still living," Joan said earnestly. "If he is, it's our duty to return the twin ring to him. Virginia would have wanted us to do it."

"There's not much chance we'll ever be able to accomplish a thing like that," Bob responded. "I'm sure I don't know how we'll ever learn Virginia's last name."

Joan sighed for she knew that Bob was right. For a time they had unraveled clues so rapidly, and now, to be confronted with a stone wall! It was too disappointing.

"No matter how the evidence points, I'm firmly convinced Virginia never lost her life in the storm," Gail

insisted for perhaps the fifteenth time. "Naturally, something happened between the time she wrote the last diary notation and the arrival of the rescue crew. But what?"

"Perhaps Nicholas kidnapped her," Bob said jokingly.

The girls did not consider this sally worthy of a reply. They sat gazing moodily out on the water until Gail asked:

"Would it be possible to locate any of *The Breneman's* other passengers, do you suppose? It's barely possible one of them might know something about Virginia."

"I think Mrs. Hodges told us everything there was to tell," Joan pointed out. "Anyway, you recall Virginia said in her diary that she kept close to her cabin, so it's unlikely anyone would have noticed her during the voyage."

"Then I guess it's hopeless," Gail said despondently.

Joan suddenly sprang to her feet.

"No, it isn't!" she cried. "I have an idea—a good one this time! What dubs we've been not to think of it before!"

"Think of what?" the others demanded.

Joan regarded them with kindly scorn. "Why, the Coast Guard station, of course. We know the local corps had charge of the rescue work when *The Breneman* went aground."

"We have been asleep," Bob admitted. "If there's one place where we should get accurate information about the disaster it's at the Coast Guard station. That is, unless all the old members have been transferred to other places. I know changes have been made recently."

"Let's hope there's someone there still who can tell us what we want to know," Joan cried, carried away with her idea. "Where is the station?"

"About five miles down the bay," Bob informed with

a sweep of his arm. "I'm half inclined to jump in my boat and chug down there this afternoon."

"Oh, I wish you would," Gail urged enthusiastically. "Joan and I might go along if you'd invite us."

"Of course you're invited," he responded heartily. "We could start about four. I hope you won't mind the trip in my old tub."

The girls laughed as they arose.

"We mind it," Gail flung back over her shoulder as they hurried away to prepare for the outing, "but for the sake of Virginia and the twin ring, we'll risk anything!"

STRANDED

BOB was waiting at the wharf when the girls came down at four o'clock. They were so excited over the anticipated excursion to the Coast Guard station that for once they failed to make deprecatory remarks about the boat. And surprisingly, *The Dying Swan* sped away from the wharf as if the spirit of youth were in its veins.

"We don't want to explain about the locket and the ring if we can avoid it," Joan answered. "We'll need some excuse for calling. You might pretend to consult them about life-saving technique, Bob."

This proposal did not please the life-guard who felt that he was an expert at his calling.

"Well, I suppose I could, only I don't know what I could ask without seeming stupid."

Presently, rounding a point of the bay, Gail indicated the Coast Guard station a short distance ahead. Joan turned to look. Bob, who had been steering a course rather far from shore, now headed *The Dying Swan's* prow directly toward the station.

For a brief interlude, everything was serene. Bob stood proudly at the helm and the girls looked absently off into space, feeling in perfect harmony with the world. Waves lapped gently against the side of the boat, even the loud chug of the engine was not repulsive to their ears. And then, without warning, it stopped.

"Now what?" Gail cried in consternation. "Are we out of gas?"

Bob shook his head but to satisfy the girls measured the tank and found it half full. From past experience he knew that *The Dying Swan's* trouble lay in her vital organs.

"I thought you said you overhauled the engine," Gail accused. "I think you left out some of the parts when you put it back together."

While Bob patiently tinkered with the engine, begriming himself with oil and grease, the girls scorched in the late afternoon sun and gazed longingly toward the Coast Guard station. The boat floated helplessly on the sea. They could tell that gradually they were drifting farther from shore.

"I wish they'd see us from the station and send out another boat," Joan remarked hopefully.

"Bob's old tub is too well known for that," Gail told her pessimistically. "Being stranded is an old story to him. Everyone knows that if worse comes to worse he can swim in, and his boat isn't worth saving."

Bob was too engrossed in his work to take offense at Gail's summary of the situation. He was far more troubled than either of the girls realized. Presently, he dropped his tools, took a long look at the receding shore line, then came over to where they were sitting.

"I guess the trouble is serious this time," he said quietly. "I'm terribly sorry I got you into this."

"Oh, it's not your fault," Joan told him good-naturedly. "If we don't get to the Station this afternoon, we can try it another day."

"We don't mind sitting here a while longer," Gail added cheerfully. "Only I hope you get the engine fixed soon or we'll drift out to sea."

"That's just the trouble," Bob returned, frowning slightly. "I don't think I'm going to get it fixed very

soon." As the girls began to look worried, he finished hastily: "We're in no immediate danger. Still, I think I'd better swim to shore for help. I can make it easily."

The girls gazed back toward the shore line. It did not look far but they knew distances over water were deceiving. It was not an impossible swim but a difficult one for the tide was running out. Bob was strong and he had worn his bathing suit. They looked ruefully down at their light summer dresses, wishing they had been as sensible.

Bob cheerfully stripped off his sweat shirt. "It won't take me long," he said encouragingly. "I'll be back with help as quickly as I can."

"Take it easy," Gail warned.

Bob dived neatly over the side and swam slowly away. Joan and Gail scarcely took their eyes from him until he was a considerable distance from the boat. Presently, he was hidden from view by a wave.

"You don't suppose he went down?" Gail murmured anxiously.

They were relieved when Bob was again sighted but almost immediately he disappeared. The girls knew that he was safe, yet for the first time they felt completely cut off from shore. As long as he had been with them in the boat it had not occurred to them to be afraid. Now they grew increasingly alarmed at the rapidity with which they were drifting. They tried to hide their uneasiness from each other by chatting about a variety of trivial subjects. Presently, however, a silence fell upon them.

"I wish we'd gone with Bob," Joan commented once. "It seems so hard—just waiting."

"We're safer here," Gail responded, peering toward shore again. "Those waves are higher than they look. I'm almost afraid that even Bob will have trouble making it."

Again they relapsed into silence. Suddenly Joan gave

a little cry of surprise, pointing toward a patrol boat some distance away which was bearing toward them.

"It's the Coast Guard!" Gail exclaimed joyfully. "They must have seen us after all!"

They waved their hands and were relieved to receive an answering signal. A few minutes later the patrol boat glided alongside with throttled motor. The government men seemed a little amused to find two girls adrift in such a dilapidated craft, but they managed serious faces as they offered a free tow to shore.

"Indeed, we'd appreciate it," Gail spoke up. "This wreck doesn't belong to us, fortunately. The owner is out there—" Vaguely, she indicated a wide sweep of water.

One of the officers had sighted Bob with his spy glass. "We'll pick him up on the way in," he promised.

The Dying Swan was hooked on to the Coast Guard boat ready for towing. The girls were then invited to ride in the more comfortable government craft, an offer they accepted with enthusiasm.

In the excitement of a rescue by the Coast Guards, Gail had completely forgotten the original purpose of their trip. Not so Joan. She knew that no time could be lost if she were to learn what she wanted to know.

"I suppose you make a great many rescues," she observed conversationally to an officer standing near her.

"It's all in the day's work," he told her, smiling. "We help stranded boats, chase a rum runner now and then and keep the waters clear of floating objects."

He was about to launch into a more detailed account of the Coast Guard work, but this was not what Joan wished to learn. She quickly intervened with another question.

"I imagine you've had a thrilling part in saving folks

when steamers are wrecked too! Were you here when *The Breneman* went aground?"

By this time Gail, realizing what was underway, had joined the two. As eagerly as did Joan, she waited for the answer.

"*The Breneman?*" the officer repeated thoughtfully. "Wrecked during the hurricane, wasn't she?"

Joan nodded eagerly.

"I remember reading about it. I was stationed in the East at the time."

"Oh," Joan murmured, trying not to show her disappointment. "I suppose others at your station did help with the rescue though."

"Oh, they did at the time, of course. Not many of the old timers left now. Most of them have been transferred out of here. Bill Evans—I guess he's the only one still here." The officer jerked his head in the direction of a man who stood at the helm.

Immediately, the girls' interest shifted to Bill Evans but before they could think of an excuse for engaging him in conversation, Bob was sighted directly ahead. He had observed the approach of the patrol boat and lay resting upon his back, waiting to be picked up.

He was hauled aboard and the patrol boat proceeded toward shore. Since Bob was very well known to the government men, and a special friend of the boatswain, he was made the brunt of a great deal of good-natured joking. He stood up loyally for *The Dying Swan*, maintaining that his only regret was the inconvenience he had caused the girls. They in turn assured him the experience had been well worth while.

Gail and Joan were determined it should turn out that way. With the shore drawing nearer and nearer, they

fell upon the unsuspecting Bill Evans like a pair of honey bees on spilled sugar.

"Oh, Mr. Evans," Gail began in her most beguiling voice, "I really don't see how you handle the boat so skillfully."

"Its nothin', Miss," replied Bill, beaming a denial of his own words. "A man gets used to boats and the different kinds o' water. Calm or stormy, it's all in the day's work."

"I shouldn't think it would be so easy in a storm," Joan encouraged him. "Especially one like the hurricane of '26."

"Now that was a storm, I'll admit. Worst I ever went through. We'll never see the like of it here again."

"Tell us about it," the girls pleaded. "Did you help in taking the passengers off *The Breneman*?"

Bill Evans liked to talk and with such flattering listeners, he could not deny them the tale.

"Aye, well I remember the night," he began reminiscently. "The first I knew *The Breneman* had gone aground was when I saw one of the Coston flares that a patrolman had touched off as a signal for help. We got down to the beach in double quick time but we couldn't launch boats in such a heavy sea. The vessel was in a bad way too. Her radio antenna had been carried away earlier, her lights were out, superwaves were breakin' over her bow and water in her hold had stopped the engines.

"She was in danger of breaking up any minute. We had to work fast. It was a real job to shoot a line to her but we finally got one across. We took all the passengers off on the breeches-buoy."

"All of them?" Joan asked tensely. "Was there a young girl aboard? A Freda Doraine?"

Bill Evans laughed gruffly. "Now, miss, I was too busy

to notice, and I didn't go around takin' down any names. Personalities didn't mean much to us that night—we were handlin' folks like so much cargo. Friend of yours, was she?"

"Well, not exactly," Joan stammered, taken unawares by the direct question. "She was listed as missing."

"Missing?" Bill shook his head as he turned the wheel slightly. "Now there must be some mistake about that. Not a single life was lost. We got every passenger off and the crew as well, from the Captain down to the cook. Guess you got your facts mixed."

The patrol boat was slowing down now for the wharf. Gail and Joan felt completely discouraged. It seemed to them that in their investigation they kept going around and around in the same small circle. Of one thing they were fairly certain. If Virginia had been aboard *The Breneman* at the time of the rescue, she had been safely taken ashore. But no matter which way they turned they always came back to the unpleasant thought that Mrs. Hodges unknowingly had implanted in their minds. Had Virginia actually been aboard the ship at the time the Coast Guard rescue crew arrived upon the scene? And how could they hope to learn her fate?

The shore was very close, but Joan had time for one more question.

"Mr. Evans, can you tell me what became of the passengers after they were taken from the ship?"

By this time Bill Evans recognized that he was being questioned for a purpose, but it was too late to become cautious in replying.

"What became of them?" he repeated, eyeing Joan speculatively. "You mean who took care of the folks? We gave some first aid ourselves to them that needed it, and turned everyone over to the Red Cross."

The government boat obligingly had towed *The Dying Swan* to the wharf near Pirate Inn, and as the Coast Guard men hauled in the tow line, the girls joined Bob in thanking them for their assistance. They stepped ashore and watched the patrol boat move slowly away.

"Our trip was a wash-out in every sense of the word," Bob declared gloomily, staring down at his little boat. "As far as I care, *The Dying Swan* can stay dead. I'm tired of nursing it along."

"Oh, you'll be friends with it again in a day or so," Gail laughed. "We really didn't mind the trip at all. We found out a few things we wanted to know."

She then repeated Bill Evans' story, emphasizing that he had said no lives were lost in the shipwreck.

"Well, he should know," Bob commented. "But that doesn't mean necessarily that Virginia didn't drown. She may have been washed overboard or she may have become so despondent about the ring and everything that she jumped."

"I'm certain she'd never do that," Joan maintained firmly. "Oh, I keep thinking she was taken off the boat safely and that she just disappeared afterwards. But it seems impossible to trace her. Of course, Bill Evans did give us a new lead but I doubt if it will develop into anything."

Gail regarded her friend in amazement. "What lead?" she demanded.

"The American Red Cross."

"Well, I don't see—" Gail began, then broke off suddenly with a little laugh. "Why of course! Bill said that the Red Cross folks looked after the ship-wrecked victims. If we can only find the right person, someone should remember Virginia, provided she ever was taken from the ship."

"That's what I thought," Joan said. "She must have been cared for along with the others."

"I doubt if anyone would remember the girl after all these years," Bob commented.

"Mrs. Hodges did," Gail reminded him. "Virginia was a distinctive sort of person. I think the clue is worth trying."

"Perhaps it is," Bob admitted. "Why not try that man I fished out of the bay? Archibald Higgins? He's in charge of the local office."

Joan approved instantly of the idea. "Bob, you should be the one to go, for he owes you a debt of gratitude. Could you make it this afternoon?"

"Afraid not. By the time I get into dry clothing the office will be closed up."

"Let's go to see him ourselves," Gail proposed, for she disliked the thought of waiting another day.

"All right," Joan agreed enthusiastically. "The race isn't very far off now and it behooves us to solve the mystery before that time if we can. We'll have to work fast to do it."

"By the way," Bob interposed, struck by a sudden thought, "when do we tell Mrs. Huston about the twin ring?"

"Oh, not for a few days at least," Gail pleaded. "Let's wait until we really have something important to tell."

"We shouldn't wait too long. She may want to substitute another trophy."

"If we learn that Virginia is still alive, the locket and ring should be returned to her," Joan said decisively. "Or if we are able to locate any of her relatives, it seems only right the possessions should be turned over to them."

"Yes," Gail concurred, "I know Aunt Ella will feel that way about it. But as the matter stands now, we

haven't anything really definite to report. Don't you think it would be better to wait until we've talked with Mr. Higgins?"

"I can't see that a few days' delay will do any harm," Joan returned. "I feel as you do about it. I'd prefer not to tell anyone until we can present all of our facts."

The three had stood talking at the wharf so long that Bob was shivering from cold.

"Do hurry and get into dry clothes," Joan urged as she and Gail turned away. "We'll dash down to Mr. Higgins' office before it closes. If we learn anything worth while, we'll tell you about it tomorrow!"

AN IMPORTANT CLUE

IT WAS nearly five-thirty when Joan and Gail paused outside the glass door of the American Red Cross offices. They were hesitant to inflict themselves upon Mr. Higgins at such a late hour, yet after their long walk in the hot sun, did not wish to turn back with their mission unaccomplished.

"Oh, let's go on in even if it is late," Gail urged. "You must do all the talking."

Such a scheme did not appeal to Joan who pointed out that Mr. Higgins was a complete stranger to her, while Gail at least knew him by sight.

"But I'd give everything away before I'd said a dozen words. You're so clever at handling people, Joan."

"None of your flattery! However, I'll do my best. If I get caught in a tight place you must come to my rescue."

Opening the door which bore the familiar red symbol, they marched boldly in. Presenting themselves at the information desk they asked to see Mr. Higgins and were told to wait. From a bench by the wall they anxiously watched the clock. Preparations were being made to close the office. Typewriters were put away, desks closed down.

"He'll never see us today," Gail whispered. "It's too late."

Just then the office girl returned and to their surprise bade them follow her to an inner room.

Mr. Higgins glanced up from a scattered array of papers on his desk. He looked down at his watch as they

came in, a pointed hint that the hour was late. "What can I do for you?" he inquired briskly.

In her haste to get at the heart of the matter, Joan introduced her subject in somewhat awkward fashion.

"We're trying to trace a young girl who was a passenger aboard the ill-fated *Breneman*," she began self-consciously. "We were informed that your organization gave aid to the ship-wrecked victims."

"Why, yes, that was one of our many activities at the time of the hurricane," Mr. Higgins returned. His voice had a faint edge of annoyance. "Our real work was rehabilitation."

Joan did not understand the meaning of the word and it daunted her for an instant. Then she went on:

"This may all seem very odd to you, but a steamer trunk was left unclaimed by one of the passengers. It fell into the possession of Mrs. Huston when she took over Pirate Inn. We are trying to aid her in tracing the owner. We thought perhaps you could help us."

"But my dear young lady, *The Breneman* was wrecked in 1926."

It was obvious to the girls that Mr. Higgins felt they were wasting his time with silly questions. Doubtlessly, he thought that they were decidedly tardy with their investigation and that Mrs. Huston should not have delegated the task to them.

"I know we are late in trying to trace the owner of the trunk," Joan acknowledged, "but until recently we assumed that the girl had been lost in the storm. Now we have reason to believe her to be alive. We thought you might furnish us with information which would make the search easier."

Mr. Higgins made an honest effort to hide his amusement.

"I am afraid not. While it is true that our organization provided temporary shelter and food for the ship-wrecked passengers, they were sent their diverse ways as quickly as possible."

"And no records were kept?"

"None of names or addresses. You say the person you seek is a girl?"

"Yes," Joan hesitated, then added: "We think her name may have been Freda Doraine."

Mr. Higgins repeated the name thoughtfully. "Freda Doraine—a rather unusual name, but it is unfamiliar to me. But then, it is not at all likely that I should remember even had I heard it." He fingered the blotter upon his desk, lost for a minute in reflection. "However, there was a girl who came to my attention. She was unusually young and pretty."

As Mr. Higgins again relapsed into meditative silence, Gail and Joan refrained from speaking lest a wrong suggestion check the trend of his thoughts.

"I am sure this girl could not be the one to whom you refer, but I was particularly interested in her case. She had suffered considerable shock and was brought to one of our relief stations with a number of other women passengers. I noticed her because she was so young to be traveling alone."

Mr. Higgins smiled at his own thoughts.

"She was a most impetuous child and very brave. I could not reason with her. She was determined to reach Miami without a day's delay."

"Miami!" Joan interposed softly.

"Yes. I explained to her that with transportation practically paralyzed, such a plan was out of the question. She was very determined. I must confess that against my better judgment I was persuaded to find a private car for

her. I hope that she reached Miami safely and suffered no ill effects from her experience aboard *The Breneman*."

"You never heard from her?" Joan questioned eagerly.

"No, and I never learned her name."

"She was an American?" Gail inquired as Mr. Higgins appeared on the verge of changing the subject.

"English, I believe. I always felt guilty about the affair, wishing I had notified her parents. She was in no condition to travel and I doubt that she had much money with her. Certainly no luggage."

"And why was she so eager to reach Miami?" Joan prompted.

"She would not tell me. At first I gathered that her parents lived there, then later she hinted that she intended to meet some friend. The entire plan was ill advised. I half suspect that she was running away from home, but I did not think of that at the time."

"And you never heard from her again," Gail murmured, casting a distressed glance at her chum.

"I did not expect it," Mr. Higgins returned. "She was only one of thousands we helped. In a single week we distributed food to more than six thousand persons, and gave out medicine to over one hundred and thirteen thousand—with the aid of our national organization, of course. So you see, it would be remarkable indeed if I were to recall this Doraine girl you mentioned. I regret that I cannot help you."

Mr. Higgins began to straighten the papers on his desk and the girls knew that the interview was at an end. Not in the least downhearted, they thanked him for his trouble and left the office. Once upon the street they capered about so madly that several passersby glanced curiously toward them.

"I'm as certain as anything that he was telling us

about Virginia!" Joan cried. "He didn't dream it, but every point tallies!"

"Absolutely. He said the girl was English. She wanted to meet a friend at Miami and was traveling alone. Also, she suffered from shock. Perhaps it was fright as much as anything. She probably thought that fellow Nicholas was after her and that he'd send her back to Bermuda."

"I wish we'd thought to have questioned Mr. Higgins about Nicholas, too," Joan returned musingly. "I wonder what became of him?"

"We can't go back now. Anyway, I doubt if Mr. Higgins could have told us. It was just luck that he recalled Virginia."

They were both highly elated at the outcome of the brief interview. It gave them new hope. Although the evidence was not conclusive, they were fairly certain now that Virginia had not lost her life in the storm.

"The pieces of our puzzle are beginning to fit," Joan declared happily. "It's perfectly clear to me why Virginia was reported as missing in the newspaper accounts of the disaster. Likely, Mr. Higgins was the only one who knew that Virginia had gone to Miami immediately after the wreck, and when the check-up of passengers was made, he was so busy with relief work he wasn't paying attention to the newspapers."

"That's a reasonable explanation, Joan. I wish we knew if Virginia reached Miami safely, but it's a comfort just to know that she escaped alive."

"I imagine she got to Miami all right," Joan said optimistically. "But there's plenty yet to learn if we expect to unravel the last few threads of our story. The one important fact we're fairly sure about is that she started for Miami, intending to meet her sweetheart there."

"And by this time they're married and living happily," Gail finished, well pleased with her deduction.

"I hope so, Gail, but I can't help wondering. Do you realize that everything was in confusion at Miami as well as here. Even worse, for the main part of the storm struck there."

"I should," Gail responded dryly. "I was in it."

"Forgive me. I didn't mean to insult your intelligence. I'm just excited and thinking aloud. What I mean to bring out is this: Virginia's sweetheart logically wouldn't be expecting her to arrive in Miami for he must have heard of the wreck."

"And he must have been as worried over her as she was over him," Gail supplied. "Possibly, he tried to come to Crystal Beach and in the confusion they missed each other. Is that what you mean, Joan?"

"Isn't it reasonable?"

"Yes," Gail admitted unwillingly, "but let's not turn our story into another 'Evangeline.'"

"I didn't say they went on searching for each other indefinitely," Joan declared. "But look at the facts. If they had met at Miami according to their plan, what would Virginia have done the first thing after they were married?"

"Now how should I know?"

"She'd have returned here to claim her trunk."

"Unless she were afraid of meeting Nicholas."

"She wouldn't be afraid of him after her marriage," Joan said. "Anyway, she was set upon returning the twin ring to her father, and if it were humanly possible, I believe she'd have done it."

"Maybe she thought the trunk was lost."

"That's so, but I'm inclined to think something else

prevented her from returning. At any rate, I doubt that she ever married."

Gail looked slightly dismayed. "How can you suggest such a thing? I declare, you're almost as bad as Bob, always taking the gloomy side. What a horrible way to end our little romance!"

"We may as well admit the facts," Joan argued.

"Theory isn't fact. I think there's almost as much reason to believe that Virginia saw him again as there is to think everything ended in tragedy. If Virginia didn't get married, what became of her? Answer me that, Joan."

"Your guess is as good as mine. We can be fairly certain she never returned to Bermuda. She was too proud for that. She couldn't have had much money. What would you have done in her case?"

Gail thought an instant before she said: "I'd have looked for work."

"Likely that's what Virginia did."

"But I doubt she was trained in any special line," Gail commented. "If she started looking for work she must have had a dreadful time of it."

They walked slowly toward Pirate Inn, thinking over the various facts they had gleaned. Although they were relieved to know that Virginia might be alive, her strange disappearance from Crystal Beach left them more baffled than before.


"Do you suppose she could still be in Miami?" Joan asked suddenly.

"After all these years? Hardly. Aunt Ella advertised in all the Miami papers when she first found the trunk."

"Then I'm afraid we've lost track of her for good," Joan acknowledged unwillingly. "I don't see how we can trace her further."

"Neither do I," Gail listlessly agreed.

They fell into a gloomy silence again as they continued toward Pirate Inn. With the race less than three weeks away, they felt duty bound to reveal to Mrs. Huston all they knew concerning the ownership of the locket and ring. And such a disclosure would ruin their delightful secret. Their only hope now rested with Bob. If he failed to conjure up some hitherto hidden clue, then indeed, all the fun was at an end.



THE MISSING FACT

A WEEK had elapsed since Gail and Joan had called upon Mr. Higgins, and in many ways they considered it a very dismal week indeed. Bob, upon being acquainted of the interview, was without a single suggestion as to how the search for Virginia might be carried on. It was tantalizing to see the locket resting on the mantel at Pirate Inn and yet make no headway in tracing its owner.

Any number of times the three discussed what should be done about the trophy for the race. They were agreed that they must report their findings to Mrs. Huston, yet day after day they kept postponing the story, hoping that something would turn up which might aid them in establishing ownership of the locket and ring.

"Even if we never locate Virginia we're reasonably certain she's alive," Gail remarked one day to Bob as they sat on the veranda of Pirate Inn. Joan had gone to the library upon what she termed a 'secret mission' and they were awaiting her return. "It wouldn't be right to use the locket for a trophy when we know it's her property."

"We must tell your aunt today, that's all there is to it," Bob soberly agreed.

"I suppose we must. Let's get it over with as soon as Joan returns."

"All right. What's Joan doing at the library anyway? It seems to me she spends half her time there lately."

"She said she wanted to look up something special

about the ring. Joan just won't admit that we've reached the end of our rope. She'll not accept defeat."

"You have to admire her for it," Bob returned warmly. "She's game through and through. It's that quality I'm banking on for the race."

Gail gave him a quick glance. "You think she has a chance to win?"

"Yes, I do." Bob thoughtfully chewed at a blade of grass. "As far as I can make out she and Margery are pretty evenly matched. Joan has pluck and courage. If she really makes up her mind to win, I think she will!"

"That's just the trouble," Gail sighed. "This race is merely another episode in her life. She's all wrapped up in finding out about the gimmal ring."

"I think she wants to win, Gail, but as you say, it's not absolutely vital to her. I'm glad she's not taking it as seriously as Margery does, but if she were a little more eager—"

He broke off for just then a figure in blue was sighted fairly flying down the street toward them. Joan was out of breath as she reached the porch.

"I've found it!" she burst out, dropping down on the steps at their feet. "Just when we'd given up!"

"Found what?" Gail demanded quickly.

"The most important fact of all. The fact that's going to make it possible for us to trace Virginia!"

"Tell us!" Gail cried, springing to her feet, and giving Joan a little shake. "What is it? How did you find it?"

"One question at a time. I'm so out of breath now I scarcely can talk."

"Well, if you don't, we'll faint of suspense," Bob cut in.

"All right, I'll try. You know for days and days I've been thinking and thinking, trying to hit upon some clue

that would aid us. This morning I had a rare inspiration. Directly after lunch I dashed off to the library and asked the librarian if she had any books giving descriptions or discussions of famous collections of jewels. When I asked for the book I only hoped to learn more exactly to what period of time our gimmel ring belongs—but what I did learn—well, it's amazing!"

Joan paused for breath, then rushed on:

"The librarian had just what I wanted. A fine old book published primarily for dealers in antiques. The collections were listed alphabetically, but under the index I found the classification: gimmel rings."

"You found our twin ring listed?" Gail interposed eagerly.

"I'm coming to that. Gimmel rings were listed under three separate collections so it took me ages to go through the material. The first gimmel was owned by a man named Jordan, the second by a Schwartz and the third by a man named Wendell—James B. Wendell of Hamilton, Bermuda."

Bob and Gail failed to register instantly upon this fact, and Joan considering it all important, abruptly paused in her narrative.

"Why, I thought that would startle you, and here you don't even blink an eyelash!"

"What's so significant about it?" Bob asked. "I suspect there are a great many jewel collectors in Bermuda. The fact that this man Wendell comes from there doesn't prove anything."

Joan was disappointed at such calm acceptance of her information, but she hurried on:

"Taken alone it may not mean a great deal, but wait until you hear the rest. Naturally, I was especially interested in the Wendell collection so I read every word about

the ring. Now listen to this. The description tallies *exactly* with the twin ring we have! Even to the inscription."

"All objections over-ruled," Bob grinned. "Joan, you're the master detective!"

"I hoped that the gold locket would be mentioned too," Joan continued, "but it wasn't. However, I'm as sure of one thing as I am that I'm sitting here. James B. Wendell is Virginia's *father*."

She sat back watching the effect of this announcement upon the two and felt well repaid by their stunned expressions.

"But isn't that mostly guess-work?" Gail managed to ask. "Couldn't there have been two gimmel rings that were alike?"

Joan had anticipated this question.

"That occurred to me as a remote possibility. I asked the librarian for a Who's Who of jewel collectors but she had never heard of one. She did think of looking through the Reader's Guide, the publication that lists all the current articles on every topic under the sun. In an old issue I found an article about ancient rings. The magazine article wasn't interesting save for one brief paragraph about this gimmel ring of Mr. Wendell's."

"That ring must be mighty famous if articles have been written about it," Bob commented.

"Yes, but listen to this. The article said that most regrettably, *the ring had been lost!*"

"Lost!" Bob exclaimed. "And we have it!"

Joan's eyes danced. "I'm sure of it. The gimmel we found hidden inside the locket was a part of the original twin ring which belonged to Mr. Wendell."

"Did the article say how much the ring was worth?" Gail asked curiously.

"No, only a description was given. And the complete

inscription. The last half of it was just what we thought: 'Let not man put asunder.' When the two halves of the ring are joined, the quotation is complete."

If Gail and Bob had felt the slightest doubt that their ring and the one described in the collection were the same, all misgivings departed as Joan repeated the inscription. There was a little silence as the three meditated upon just what this latest discovery might mean.

"Well, it behooves us to try to communicate with Virginia's father," Joan said a minute later. "We know her last name and of course his, if my deduction is correct. For all we know, Mr. Wendell may still be living in Bermuda."

"Virginia always meant to return the ring, and since she failed, the duty falls upon us," Gail acknowledged. "Only we must be very careful not to turn it over to the wrong person."

Bob arose with a decisive gesture. "There's only one thing to do and that's to tell Mrs. Huston the entire yarn before we go a step farther. After all, it's up to her to decide what is to be done, for the locket and ring are more in her trust than ours. Besides, there's the race to be considered."

Gail proposed that they get the locket and the ring and then tell her aunt of their discoveries. Determinedly, the three marched into Pirate Inn where they found Mrs. Huston in her private sitting room.

She did not speak for several minutes after the young folks had finished their story, although she had asked many questions during the telling of it. She sat fingering the locket and the gimmel ring which Gail had dropped into her lap.

"The story is amazing," she said at last. "I suspected

you youngsters were up to something, but I never dreamed your secret was this important."

"We should have told you before only we wanted to keep it a secret until we had some clue as to the identity of the owner," Gail explained. "With the race so close, we didn't dare wait another day."

"I'm glad you didn't," Mrs. Huston smiled. "As far as the race is concerned, your discovery is a trifle disconcerting. I should never have offered the locket as a trophy in the first place, but so many persons begged me to do it, and I honestly thought that the owner of the trunk had been lost at sea."

"It was a natural supposition," Joan said.

"I should have read the diary more carefully. I must confess I skipped. Now about the race—the locket must be withdrawn, of course. Fortunately, there is still time to purchase a loving cup to replace it."

The young people had known Mrs. Huston would make such a decision, yet they realized that the withdrawal of the locket as the racing trophy might lead to complications.

"You intend to return the locket and ring to Mr. Wendell?" Gail asked.

"Most assuredly, if it is proven that he is Virginia's father. Under the circumstance, I should not dream of offering the locket as a prize."

They began to discuss ways and means of communicating with the collector in Bermuda. Joan and Gail did not feel equal to the task of writing the letter, and begged Mrs. Huston to do it for them. She promised she would attend to it that very day.

"It may never reach him, but we can worry about that later," she commented.

"Oh, I hope we get a reply before the race comes off,"

Gail remarked. "Is there time, do you think, Aunt Ella?"

Mrs. Huston consulted her desk calendar. "I should judge so, if the letter is sent off today."

"What about the matter of announcing the withdrawal of the locket as a prize for the race?" Bob questioned.

"That must be done at once," Mrs. Huston told him. "I must confess I dread telling the members of your swimming club."

"Why should they blame you?" Joan demanded. "It seems to me that a prize or trophy is merely a detail of a race."

Gail and Bob exchanged significant glances. They suspected that in the eyes of Margery Annas the trophy would loom as a rather large detail. They did not distress Mrs. Huston by any dire predictions. Instead Gail said:

"Aunt Ella, you won't need to tell everyone your reason for withdrawing the locket, will you? It may take us months to locate Virginia or her father—perhaps we'll never find them. The fun will be utterly ruined if everyone in Crystal Beach knows what we are about."

"I understand how you feel," Mrs. Huston said quietly. "After all, this is your little mystery, and it's your right to keep it to yourselves. If you like, I'll only announce that I have decided to withdraw the locket and let it go at that."

This promise satisfied Gail and Joan, but while Bob said nothing at the time, he was doubtful that the difficulty could be solved so easily.

A few minutes later the three returned to the veranda that Mrs. Huston might have an opportunity to write the all-important letter to Mr. Wendell.

"I'm glad it's all settled about the locket," Gail remarked with a sigh. "It's a load off my mind."

"It's settled as far as we're concerned," Bob admitted,

"but I'm thinking we may have shifted our troubles upon your aunt."

"How do you mean?"

Bob did not reply at once. And then it was only to say quietly:

"Unless I miss my guess Margery isn't going to take the change in trophies with a very good grace. I hope she won't make trouble—but time will tell."

AN ANNOYING SITUATION

BOB was not wrong in his premonition of trouble. The very next afternoon at the regular monthly meeting of the Swimmers' Club held at Pirate Inn, an announcement was made regarding the substitution of racing trophies. Without disclosing the story which had been related to her, Mrs. Huston quietly explained to the young people that she had found it necessary to withdraw the locket, offering in its place a fine silver loving cup.

'There was a murmur of disappointment, then polite silence.

Having delivered her little speech, Mrs. Huston discretely withdrew. No sooner had she gone from the room than Margery Annas sprang to her feet.

"I don't consider it fair to withdraw the locket after it once was offered to our club! I propose that we make an official protest!"

Sitting down as suddenly as she had arisen, Margery directed a sharp look at Gail, implying that she suspected her of being at the bottom of it all. The color mounted to Gail's cheeks and she half arose from her chair. Joan pulled her back.

"It seems to me that such a protest would be in bad taste," Bob said quietly. "Mrs. Huston generously has provided our club with racing trophies for several years. She allows us the use of this room for our club meetings. If she wishes to withdraw the trophy, or offer

none at all, it appears to me to be entirely within her rights."

This speech was greeted by a murmur of approval by nearly everyone in the room. Mrs. Huston was highly popular with the young people. Save for Margery Annas no one considered that her action had been unfair although it was something of a disappointment to the girls who planned upon entering the race. Several speakers arose in turn to support Bob's opinion.

"I intend to withdraw from the race," Margery announced in a loud whisper to the girl who sat beside her. She added in a tone which everyone heard: "I guess I know why Mrs. Huston changed her mind!"

Bob rapped sharply for order and presented a matter of routine business. Everyone was relieved a few minutes later when the meeting ended.

"Margery intends to make trouble just as I thought," Bob commented to Joan and Gail after the others had left the Inn. "Because she is one of the best swimmers at Crystal Beach she thinks the race can't be put on without her."

"Do you think she will withdraw?" Joan asked curiously.

Bob shrugged. "You never can tell what Margery will do. It all depends upon her mood. But I suspect she'll be at the starting line when the gun cracks."

Gail was still feeling indignant. "My blood simply boiled when she made that horrid speech! She looked right straight at me too. I know what she meant to imply. She wants folks to think Aunt Ella withdrew the locket so I can have it myself!"

"Oh, I doubt that she really meant to give such an impression," Joan rejoined comfortingly. "She was ex-

cited and so are you. Anyone who knows you, Gail, would laugh at such a suggestion."

"And it's quite possible that Margery is honest in her opinion, misguided though it is," Bob added.

"Honest?" Gail drew away. "Well, I don't like that!"

Bob hastened to explain. "What I mean is this. Margery has been attached to that locket from the very first. Lately, you've been doing a great deal of enthusiastic talking about it yourself. Several times out among friends I've heard you remark that you shouldn't mind winning it yourself."

"That's true," Joan chimed in. "We've all worked up so much admiration for that trinket. It's quite possible Margery heard some of your remarks, Gail, and by putting two and two together decided that it makes six."

"How ridiculous! As if Aunt Ella would give me that locket if I wanted it."

"Of course it's ridiculous," Bob agreed, "but you know Margery never could see but one side of a question."

"Well, I'm willing to let the matter drop," Gail promised. "We don't want Aunt Ella to hear about all this trouble."

Inevitably, Mrs. Huston did learn of Margery's outspoken words at the meeting and was distressed. While she knew that the spoiled girl's opinion was not an expression of the feelings of others, she considered herself to blame for the unfortunate situation. Bent upon making amends, she searched the local stores for a loving cup, and finding none which satisfied her, determined to make a trip to a large jewelry store in a nearby city store. Gail and Joan would have accompanied her had she not chosen to make the excursion upon the same day that the school play was to be given. While Mrs. Huston planned to return before the scheduled hour of its presentation, all

were agreed that it would not do for Gail to tire herself unnecessarily.

"I'm afraid something will happen and you'll not get back in time," Gail said uneasily to her aunt. "I'd be so disappointed if you missed the play."

"I'll see it all right," Mrs. Huston smiled. "However, I may take a late train back, and in that case I'll go directly to the theater from the station. If I'm not home by seven o'clock don't wait for me."

During the afternoon the girls were left to themselves, but Joan found Gail poor company. She was nervous and distracted, and although she knew her play lines perfectly and could almost recite them backwards, went about with a book in one hand, murmuring them to herself over and over.

"I just know I'll forget," she fretted. "If I do I'll sink straight through the floor."

Gail had decided to apply her make-up at home, preferring not to invade the crowded dressing room at too early an hour. Joan gladly lent assistance, using paint with a lavish hand.

"You look simply grand," she praised, stepping back a pace to study her handiwork. "No, you need just a speck more powder on your nose. And haven't you a string of beads you can wear? It would set off your costume admirably."

A bright line shone in Gail's eyes.

"I might wear the locket, Joan! It would go beautifully with my white costume. And I've always wanted to wear it—just once!"

Joan looked a trifle aghast.

"Oh, don't look so shocked," Gail laughed, giving her friend a little squeeze. "I know the locket isn't ours, but it wouldn't do a speck of harm to wear it this one night.

If Mr. Wendell or Virginia ever claim it, it will be here for them.”

“But what will Mrs. Huston say?” Joan asked doubtfully.

“She wouldn’t mind, I’m sure. Perhaps she’ll get back in time for me to ask her.”

Joan glanced at the clock. It was five minutes to seven and Mrs. Huston had warned them not to look for her after that hour.

“She must have waited for the later train, Gail. If you’re to reach the theater at the time Mr. Balerton said, we must hurry.”

Gail sat tapping a comb thoughtfully against the corner of the maple dressing table. The urge to wear the locket was too great to resist. Impulsively, she sprang to her feet.

“Oh, I know Aunt Ella would give me permission to wear it if she were here! I’m going downstairs for it now.”

Gail removed the locket from its leather case. She held it up admiringly for an instant, then fastened it about her neck.

“How does it look?”

“It does add that final touch,” Joan admitted reluctantly. “Are you going to leave the twin ring inside?”

“Why not? There’s no sense in taking it out, for I’ll not open the locket even if the girls ask me to. Oh, Joan, why do you look so anxious? It’s all right.”

Joan relaxed, giving Gail’s arm an affectionate squeeze.

“Was I looking that way? I didn’t mean to. But do take good care of the locket.”

“Oh, I shall, never fear.”

It was growing late and the girls dared tarry no longer. Hastily, they gathered up Gail’s things, packing

them into a light bag, and left the Inn. Joan had promised to stay back-stage with Gail that she might help her change costumes between scenes, so they both slipped quietly into the theater by means of the stage door.

Gail was very glad that she had applied make-up at home for the girl's dressing room was in the greatest confusion. Costumes were scattered about and everyone was talking at once. Several times the matron in charge warned the girls that they must be quiet or their voices would carry to the audience.

Joan helped Gail dress and tried to bolster up her courage when at last came the signal that the curtain was about to rise.

"I can't remember a word of my first speech," Gail whispered in panic as they stood together in the wings. "Oh, there's my cue! I've got to go on."

There was a long moment of anxiety for Joan as she wondered if Gail really had forgotten. She felt almost as frightened as if she were doing the part herself. Then her chum began to speak her first lines in a calm, cool little voice, gaining confidence as she went on.

Relaxing, Joan moved quietly away to find a more advantageous place from which to watch. Before the play was a quarter finished she was convinced that Gail had proven herself the star.

With scarcely a hitch, scene after scene moved along. Since Joan had listened to the lines so many times before, she found her interest shifting to Mr. Balerton. He stood in the right wing, play book in hand, but so well had he trained the young people that seldom was it necessary for him to prompt them. Between scenes he moved quietly about, attending to overlooked details, seeing that everything ran exactly on schedule.

And then at length, amid thunderous applause, the

final curtain dropped. Gail and several of the other leading players were called back to take their bows. A small boy dressed as a page came down the aisle with a huge basket of roses for Gail. The flowers were from Bob.

"You did marvelously," Joan praised, following her dazed chum toward the dressing room. "And such beautiful roses!"

"I wonder if Aunt Ella got here in time to see the play?" Gail questioned anxiously. "I couldn't locate her in the audience."

"I saw her. She looked very proud, and you should have seen her applaud."

Already friends and proud relatives were pouring backstage to shower praise upon the young people. Joan and Gail found the hall so jammed that it was difficult to reach the dressing room. Persons not connected with the play had gathered there too, and as Joan expressed it, a sardine can was roomy by comparison.

"I'll stay outside in the hall until you're dressed," she offered considerably.

Although few of Margery Annas' friends were in the play, she had pressed her way into the dressing room. She praised everyone save Gail in glowing terms. To her she merely said: "Wearing the locket, I see!"

Gail ignored the remark, but it gave her an uncomfortable moment. She waited until the dressing room had cleared somewhat and then found a corner where she could change her costume. She was removing the last of her grease paint when Joan thrust her head in at the door.

"You're wanted on the telephone, Gail. Can you answer?"

"A phone call for me?" Gail sprang up from her chair in delighted surprise. "Of course I can answer."

Joan waited outside the dressing room until her chum

returned from the telephone booth. In the meantime, the room had nearly emptied and even Margery Annas had departed.

"Come on in with me now," Gail insisted. "There's plenty of room."

"Did you get your call all right?" Joan inquired.

"It was nothing." Gail spoke in a tone which conveyed that she had turned down an unwanted "date." "It was that bashful Simmons boy. He always calls me at the most impossible time and place."

She hummed a little song as she wiped off the last trace of make-up. Suddenly, in the mirror she saw Joan's eyes fixed upon her.

"Why, Joan, why are you staring so?"

"Your locket! Did you take it off?"

Gail's hand went to her throat.

"Why, no. Yes, I believe I did too—I had it in my hand when you told me about the 'phone call. I took it off so I wouldn't get any cold cream on it. Oh, dear it must be here in the dressing room."

"We'll find it then," Joan said quietly. "Don't get excited."

Gail sprang up from her chair and began removing articles from the top of the dressing table. The locket was not there. Frantically, she searched the room.

They looked about the floor and Gail shook several garments which had been dropped on a chair.

"Has anyone seen my locket?" Gail anxiously inquired of the three girls who remained in the room. "I'm afraid I've lost it."

She was panic stricken now and trying her best to hide it.

The others declared that they had seen nothing of the trinket but generously offered to help look for it. While

Joan and the girls searched the dressing room, Gail retraced her steps to the telephone booth. She hunted along the hall and even upon the stage. She inquired of everyone if they had seen the trinket and even mentioned the loss to Mr. Balerton.

"If you don't find it tonight it may turn up in the morning when everything is cleaned," he suggested. "Was it valuable?"

"Yes, it was," Gail told him, nearly in tears. "I shouldn't have worn it."

She rushed back to the dressing room hoping that in her absence Joan had found the locket. Her chum was still searching; the volunteer helpers had deserted.

While the two girls were turning the room upside down for the third time, Mrs. Huston came backstage to learn what was delaying them. She heard the distressing story in silence and did not chide Gail for wearing the locket.

"It's very unfortunate, but I'm certain we'll find it here somewhere," she said. "Let me search."

"Where do you think you put it?" Joan asked for the third time. "Think hard."

"I've told you," Gail moaned. "I had it in my hand when you told me about the telephone call. I think I must have dropped it right here on the dressing table."

"Well, it's certainly not there now," Joan sighed. "No use looking in the same place again."

Gail sank down into a chair, burying her face in her hands.

"Oh, it makes me fairly sick. I think someone took it deliberately."

"Don't say that," Mrs. Huston reproved. "You know how careless you are about your things."

"Margery Annas was here at the time, wasn't she?" Gail demanded, paying no heed to her aunt's suggestion.

"She noticed I was wearing the locket too, and mentioned it."

"Margery left just a minute or so after you went to the telephone," Joan informed.

"She doesn't like me and she's always wanted that locket—"

"Gail!" Mrs. Huston interposed sharply. "I'm ashamed of you. You're excited or you would never suggest such a thing!"

"There were other persons in the room all the time," Joan pointed out. "I don't see how anyone could have taken it undetected."

"Well, it's gone and we've searched everywhere."

"Margery is a very spoiled girl, but I am certain she would never steal," Mrs. Huston said quietly. "Gail, until you have evidence upon which to base your opinion, I don't care to hear you suggest such a thing again."

Joan tried her best to cheer Gail as they rode home in Mrs. Huston's car, but with scant success. And in her heart she too was convinced that the locket would not turn up in the morning.

"And just think!" Gail bemoaned, in the privacy of their bedroom. "It's not only the locket that's gone, but the twin ring as well! I wish we never had written that letter to Mr. Wendell. What shall we do if we hear from him now?"

"Don't lose heart," she said with as much cheer as she could muster. "We'll find that ring somehow!"

THE LOST RING

GAIL did not sleep well that night. She and Joan were up at six o'clock and seven-thirty found them at the door of the theater. Early as they were, Mr. Balerton had arrived ahead of them to gather up all the rented costumes which were to be shipped to an out-of-town agency. Otherwise, the girls were the first to re-enter the theater.

They spent two dismal hours searching for the missing locket and finally were forced to the conclusion that they would never find it.

"I'll let you know if anyone turns it in," Mr. Balerton promised as they left.

The next few days were unhappy ones for the girls and for Bob as well. He, too, was of the opinion that the locket would never be found. The news of Gail's loss had spread and while nothing was said openly, she felt that her friends were inclined to feel that she had been indiscreet in wearing the locket.

"It's really no one's business except Mrs. Huston's," Bob remarked. "The trouble is that everyone feels a personal interest in the locket because it was offered as a racing trophy."

"I have no one to blame but myself," Gail grieved. "Vanity proved my undoing. I feel the meanest on account of Mr. Wendell. If he answers our letter now, I'll have to explain that I lost the locket and ring. I'd rather die than do that."

"And I may have made it worse," Joan confessed. "You see, I thought I'd do something to surprise you both. I've always wanted to find Virginia, and it occurred to me that even if we do hear from her father, likely enough he'll be more anxious than we are to know what became of her."

"I wish we could find her even if the ring is gone," Gail said wistfully. "But what is this dreadful thing you claim to have done?"

Joan thrust the advertising page of a New York paper into her friend's hand. She indicated a brief insertion in the personal column which had been marked with pencil.

"I realize now I was too ambitious," she admitted, "but at the time it seemed like a good idea."

Gail peered at the advertisement, reading it aloud:

"Virginia Wendell—Please communicate immediately with J. Bernell, Pirate Inn, Crystal Beach, Fla. Matter of vital importance."

"You inserted that advertisement?" Bob demanded in amazement.

"Yes, I did, and what's worse, I had it run in five southern city papers as well. I ruined a week's allowance to do it."

"But Joan, why did you waste your money?" Gail questioned, puzzled. "Aunt Ella advertised in the Miami paper at the time she found the trunk, you know."

"That was years ago. I realize it was a wild thing to do, but I just had a hunch we might locate Virginia if she still is in this country. The New York papers particularly have a wide circulation."

"Even if Virginia were living in New York, which is highly doubtful, there's about one chance in a thousand she'll see this ad," Gail commented.

"I don't really expect her to see it," Joan returned.

"Even if I wasted my money, I did it because of that thousandth chance. I got to thinking that Mr. Wendell never knew what became of his daughter, and that it would mean a great deal to him to learn if she were still alive."

"It was noble of you to spend all that money," Gail told her, "and I hope it won't be entirely wasted. Though goodness knows how I could ever face Virginia if she were to appear! How could I tell her about the ring and the locket?"

"I don't believe you'll need to worry about that," Bob smiled. "I'd as soon expect to see a ghost."

In every way he was endeavoring to make the girls forget the loss of the locket for it was coloring all of their thoughts and actions. At their morning swims, Gail spent most of her time sitting morosely on the beach and even Joan did not seem to have the same enthusiasm for the coming race, although she trained as faithfully as before.

Others who were expected to enter the competition were seen frequently in the water. Many girls were in far better swimming form than Bob had expected. It would seem to a casual observer that all was as it should be and yet Bob knew that an undefinable "do or die" spirit was lacking.

True to her word, Mrs. Huston had purchased a handsome silver loving cup as the trophy for the race. Members of the Swimmers' Club and other interested townspeople came to Pirate Inn to admire it. Margery Annas never came.

Several times she mentioned that she did not intend to compete in the race, but, as Bob and the girls frequently saw her at the beach with her trainer, they discounted such rumors.

Yet as the days slipped by, it was apparent to everyone that as far as the swimmers were concerned, interest in the coming contest was not as intense as it had been in previous years. Psychologically, the substitution of the cup for the locket had been a mistake, although one which could not be helped.

Even Joan was forced to admit that her interest in the race was not as keen since the change in trophies.

"It's not that the prize means more than the race," she justified herself, "but there is something intensely personal about the locket. Its history intrigued everyone. Naturally, when it was replaced by another trophy, there was bound to be a let-down."

"Well, I can understand how everyone feels I've sold them down the river," Gail said remorsefully. "I'd give anything I own to find what became of that locket and ring!"

The arrival of mail became one of the absorbing interests of life. The girls usually managed to be on hand when the postman came and Bob fell into the habit of dropping in at Pirate Inn at least once daily to inquire if they had received any communication.

"I guess I wasted my money on that advertisement all right," Joan acknowledged. "It's been five days now since it ran, and if Virginia Wendell saw it, we'd have heard from her by this time."

With so many of their plans gone awry, the young people were plunged into the depth of mental depression. However, an even more devastating blow was destined to fall.

With the race only two days away, Bob tapered off the long swims which Joan had been making, warning her to take things easy until after the contest. To fill in the time, Joan and Gail frequented a nearby pool, in-

teresting themselves in diving, an art in which the latter was more proficient than her friend. For the most part, Joan sat on the edge of the pool watching Gail perform.

"Try a half-twist dive just once," Gail encouraged. "I'm sure you could do it the first time. See." She gave a land demonstration. "After you reach your swan position, drop your right shoulder and turn your head sharply in the opposite direction."

It looked simple when Gail did it and Joan could not resist the temptation to try. She started the twist correctly as she left the board, but in mid-air she seemed to forget what she had intended to do. She tried to save herself from an awkward fall and so took a far worse one, striking the water in a relaxed heap.

Joan took a long time coming to the surface.

"Try it again," Gail laughed as she reappeared. Then she saw the expression of pain on the other's face. "Why, you're hurt!"

Joan tried to laugh carelessly as she climbed from the pool.

"It's nothing. I twisted my back and hurt my shoulder a little. I'll be all right in a minute."

She sat down on the side of the pool while Gail massaged the painful muscles. Joan winced at the pressure of her chum's hands.

"Oh, I wish I hadn't asked you to try that silly dive," Gail said in a worried tone. "Do you think you'll be all right for the race?"

"I think I will. The pain may go away in an hour or two."

Joan rested all that afternoon, but the next morning when she awoke the shoulder muscle was nearly as sore as ever. It was the day before the race. Realizing that

the injury would seriously handicap her in the swim, she sought Bob and told him what had happened.

"It's a bad break," he admitted gloomily. "Of course, the soreness may work off as you swim, but at best you'll be at a disadvantage."

Joan tried out the arm with a brief swim. After a time the soreness did seem to go away, but she knew it would return.

"Here it is the day before the race, and we're glooming all over the place," Bob commented some hours later as they sat upon the veranda of Pirate Inn waiting for Gail who had gone to the grocery store.

"If the way I swam this morning is any indication of the way I'll do tomorrow I may as well not enter," Joan returned miserably. "Has Margery signed up yet?"

Bob nodded. "She handed in her name about ten minutes before the list closed. I knew she would. You can't keep her out of a race. Joan, I sure hope you win tomorrow."

"So do I, but I'm not counting on it. It isn't just the injury to my shoulder. For some reason I feel terribly downhearted. Everything has been going wrong for a week and—"

She broke off as she caught sight of Gail hurrying down the street toward them.

"What's up now?" Bob murmured. "She's excited about something."

Gail was almost running. Her face was flushed more from anger than exertion.

"What's wrong?" Joan asked quickly, arising.

"I've just discovered what became of our gimmel ring!" Gail told them. "Oh, I scarcely could believe my own eyes!"

"Not Margery?" Bob and Joan demanded together.

They were unprepared for the startling answer.

"No, Mr. Balerton!"

Joan and Bob were too stunned to reply instantly. As the full significance of Gail's information dawned upon them they were inclined to doubt that it could be true.

"Oh, Gail," Joan exclaimed, "you must be mistaken!"

"Why, he'd be above taking a ring and a locket," Bob added.

"I don't say he took it deliberately. But he has our ring."

"What makes you think so?" Joan asked.

"Because I saw it with my own eyes—that's why. I'm all upset about it. In fact, I was so shocked I just stood there and stared and never said a word."

Joan looked relieved. She was very glad that Gail, always inclined to be impulsive, had not done anything rash. "You stood where?" she probed gently. "Tell us exactly what happened."

Bob pushed a porch chair toward her, but Gail was far too excited to sit down. As she talked, she paced the veranda.

"I went to the delicatessen store at the corner for some butter—I guess I forgot to buy it after all, but that doesn't matter. Mr. Balerton happened to be there too and he spoke to me."

"Not about the locket?" Joan interposed.

"Yes, he brought the subject up himself. He asked me if I had found it and I said I hadn't. We talked a minute or two, then he went on buying a few things. I didn't pay any particular heed until he drew out a wallet to pay his bill. I don't know why I looked just when I did, but as he took out his money, I distinctly saw our gimmel ring. He had it on a tiny little gold chain which seemed to be fastened into the wallet some way."

"You're sure it was the twin ring?" Bob asked doubtfully. "I'm not questioning your word, only it's hard to believe. A ring is quite a small object to be identified positively from a distance. You may have been mistaken."

Gail was not to be shaken from her stand.

"It was the gimmel, right enough. I was simply shocked. If he hadn't spoken about the locket only a minute before, I'd have thought he had just found the ring and meant to return it to me."

"Perhaps he did forget he had it," Bob suggested, although he had no faith in his own words.

"How could he forget? If he had found the ring in the theater it would have been the natural thing to speak of it when he first saw me."

Joan was more than half convinced that the ring Gail had seen was not theirs but one which at a casual glance appeared similar.

"Did Mr. Balerton know that you saw the ring in his wallet?" she questioned.

"I don't think so. I just stood there staring. He picked up his packages and walked out of the store before I could say a word. I should have gone after him, but I was so stunned I couldn't."

"You did wisely to wait until we've had a chance to sift the matter," Joan told her. "Did you see the locket as well as the ring?"

"No, only the ring. Oh, it's as hard for me to believe it as it is for you two. I've known Mr. Balerton for years. I don't think he deliberately took the ring. I simply can't understand it, that's all."

"I think there's some mistake that can be cleared up," Joan maintained. "You must remember, Mr. Balerton didn't even know about the ring, Gail. You only mentioned that you lost the locket."

"That's so, I hadn't thought of that."

"He may have picked up the ring somewhere and never once connected it with the loss of the locket. Now I think the thing for us to do is to go and politely ask Mr. Balerton where he got the ring."

Such a course suited the others admirably. With drastic action in sight, Gail quieted down somewhat. Joan went inside for her hat and then they marched determinedly down the street toward Mr. Balerton's rooming house. Gail was not certain where it was. They tried three places before they found the right one.

In response to their knock at the door, an elderly lady, evidently the rooming house owner, greeted them pleasantly.

"Mr. Balerton?" she repeated after them. "Now that's just too bad—you missed him by not more than five minutes. He bought a few things for me at the grocery store and then left."

"When will he return?" Gail asked tensely.

"Not until late tonight. He went out on the bay I think. At least I saw him stowing his rod in the back of his coupe and he drove off toward the beach. I couldn't even promise that you'd get to see him this evening, for sometimes he stays out quite late."

She noticed the troubled expressions of the young people and added quickly: "Can I take a message for him?"

Gail hesitated, glancing toward her companions for a cue.

"No, I guess not. We'll come back later."

Disconsolately, the three retraced their steps to Pirate Inn. Everything had gone wrong for the past week. They felt that the suspense of waiting for Mr. Balerton would be more than they could endure.

"Let's take *The Minx* and see if we can find him out on the bay," Gail proposed.

Anything was better than inactivity. Mrs. Huston gave them permission to take the boat although they did not tell her why they wished to use it. They scoured the waters near Turkill Isle without success and even stopped at the dock where rowboats were rented out to inquire if Mr. Balerton had been there. No one had seen him.

"Maybe he's left town and will never come back," Gail remarked gloomily as they returned once more to Pirate Inn.

"We'll see him tomorrow," Joan maintained staunchly. "And if he actually has your ring I'm certain you'll get it back."

Gail sighed disconsolately. It seemed to her that her troubles were almost too great to bear.

"I wish I could get it back before the race tomorrow. It would help to clear the atmosphere. Margery has done so much talking among the girls that I shouldn't be surprised if some of them think I deliberately lost that locket. Still, I'm sorry I ever accused Margery of taking it, even among friends."

"Let's not condemn anyone until we are sure," Joan said quietly. "We must move very carefully."

"You know how this town is," Bob added warningly. "Even a suggestion that Mr. Balerton kept your ring, might cost him his position."

"I know I'm inclined to be impetuous and say things I don't really mean," Gail acknowledged. "I promise to be careful this time. I'll not say a word to anyone until after he has a chance to explain. I wish now that we had left word for him to call at Pirate Inn."

The three were anything but cheerful as they sat down once more on the cool veranda. It was something of a

relief to think that the gimmal ring possibly had been located, but the peculiar circumstances of its finding disturbed them all. Even should the ring prove to be theirs, the locket still remained to be found.

Joan felt that unless matters cleared up somewhat before the Turkill Isle race, she could not enter wholeheartedly into the competition. Her shoulder hurt whenever she turned it. She longed to drop out of the race, but with her friends counting upon her entry, she did not have the heart to disappoint them.

"Here comes the postman," Gail announced listlessly a minute later. "He's slow today. I don't suppose there's the slightest use expecting he'll bring us anything."

Half-heartedly, she arose and went to meet him. Joan and Bob remained hunched over in the porch swing, their dejected postures proclaiming that they had abandoned all hope of anything pleasant ever happening again. A communication from Bermuda or an answer to Joan's advertisement seemed entirely out of the picture.

They saw the mailman hand Gail a thick letter, but it was not until she came toward them, waving it triumphantly, that they showed the slightest interest.

"It's here at last!"

Bob and Joan sprang up, their despondency vanishing upon the instant.

"An answer to my advertisement?" Joan demanded hopefully.

Gail held up a long envelope bearing a foreign stamp.

"No, it's addressed to Aunt Ella, but it's from Bermuda! It must be from Mr. Wendell!"

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR

FOR days the young folks eagerly had been anticipating the arrival of a letter from Bermuda. Now that it had come, they almost dreaded to learn of its contents. Would it be written by Mr. Wendell himself, they wondered, or perhaps by some stranger, telling of the collector's demise.

Gail had an uncomfortable moment as she wished that Mrs. Huston had not reported the discovery of the gim-mal ring in her first letter to Mr. Wendell. If the man were alive, it would be natural that he would request the return of both the ring and the locket. She dreaded the thought of making the necessary explanation.

"Well, we may as well find out what it says," Gail declared, after they had stood silently staring at the envelope.

Somewhat soberly, the three marched into Mrs. Huston's living room. Gail dropped the letter into her aunt's lap.

"Open it quick!" she commanded. "It's from Bermuda."

With a surprised smile, for she had never expected to receive a communication after the elapse of so many days, Mrs. Huston reached for a penknife. Joan anticipated the thought and thrust it into her hand. It seemed to Bob and the girls that it took ages for her to slit the envelope. They watched her face anxiously as she scanned the signature at the end of the page.

"Why, it's from Mr. Wendell himself!" she declared,

her face alight with interest. "My letter reached its destination after all."

"What does he say?" Gail demanded, dancing around her aunt's chair where she could look over her shoulder. "Do read it aloud."

Mrs. Huston adjusted her glasses and began in a steady voice:

"Dear Madam: Your kind letter arrived some days ago but as a slight indisposition kept me from my desk the past week it did not reach my attention until this morning.

"The story which you related touched me more deeply than I can express. I am convinced that the girl you mention is my own daughter, Virginia Ann. Due to a misunderstanding which I fear resulted largely from my lack of understanding, my daughter ran away from home. It is my belief that she eloped with an American, but while I have made every effort, I have never been able to trace either of them.

"In my mind there is no doubt that my daughter sailed aboard *The Breneman* under the name of Freda Doraine, for that was her mother's maiden name. The gimmel ring to which you refer, was to have become her property upon her eighteenth birthday.

"I have long ago forgiven Virginia for taking the ring when she left in such haste, and could I reach her, would have her know that I consider it truly hers, to do with as she wishes."

"There, you see!" Joan interrupted the reading triumphantly. "I always thought Mr. Wendell didn't mean to be unkind."

Mrs. Huston picked up the letter again, resuming where she had left off.

"Should you be successful in tracing Virginia I beg

that you repeat this to her. Tell her that I have forgiven everything and that she need have no fear that I shall ever try to force her into a marriage with Frorie or any other person against her will. If she has married the American, tell her that I wish her the greatest of happiness. I am an old man now; my only prayer is that we may be reunited before it is too late.

"I am unable to express my deep appreciation for the help which your niece and her friends have given me. When your letter came I was hopelessly discouraged. Now I shall continue the long search for my daughter with renewed courage. Very shortly, my health permitting, I plan to visit the United States and shall call at Crystal Beach for a long talk, and to thank you personally for your kindness."

The letter was signed, "Faithfully yours, James B. Wendell."

No one spoke for a full minute after Mrs. Huston had finished. At last Joan said softly:

"What a perfectly sweet letter. If only Virginia were here to read it!"

"Poor Mr. Wendell must be dreadfully lonesome," Gail commented sympathetically. "He's heartbroken because his daughter ran away."

She picked up the letter which her aunt had dropped upon the table, carefully rereading it.

"He doesn't say a word about wanting the ring or the locket," she pointed out in relief. "Do you suppose he forgot to mention it?"

"I rather think he's leaving that up to us," Mrs. Huston returned. "Of course, when I write again, I must explain how the locket and ring were lost. That won't be easy."

Gail's downcast face expressed a similar sentiment.

She was on the verge of telling her aunt of their latest clue had not Bob spoken up.

"This letter clears up a number of things we were puzzled about, but there's still a lot we don't know. We were right about Virginia taking an assumed name and it's pretty conclusive now that she ran away because Mr. Wendell wanted her to marry against her wishes."

"The aggravating part of it all is that while we can guess what happened before *The Breneman* was wrecked we haven't the slightest idea what came after that," Joan offered. "We don't know whether Virginia ever married or not. And we don't know what became of Nicholas."

"I don't think it matters what became of him," Bob expressed. "My guess is that Virginia was never troubled by him after she left the ship. If he had seen her, he'd have reported the meeting to his brother Frorie, who in turn would have told Mr. Wendell."

"That may be so," Joan nodded, "but I wish we didn't have to guess. I wish we *knew*."

Mrs. Huston reminded the young folks of Mr. Wendell's promise to visit Crystal Beach soon. She considered it likely that when they talked with him personally, the collector might be able to clear up many doubtful points of the mystery.

"It will be weeks and weeks at best before he gets here," Gail complained. "That's such a long time to wait."

"He'll never be able to tell us what became of Virginia," Joan added. "Oh, why can't we find her? I'll never rest until we do."

Bob pointed out that with the new information they had provided Mr. Wendell it might be much easier to trace Virginia.

"No doubt he'll put a detective on the case," he told the girls.

Gail gave a slight sniff. She did not feel that a detective could do more than they already had done.

"Joan here is better than three detectives," she declared proudly. "Oh, why can't we find Virginia ourselves?"

"My idea about running the advertisements in the papers didn't seem to work," Joan said ruefully. "I'm afraid my ideas are exhausted."

Mrs. Huston suggested that they allow the matter to rest until after the Turkill Isle race. "By the way," she questioned shrewdly, "what is the trouble?"

"Trouble?" Bob echoed innocently, though he knew well enough what she meant.

"Unless I am mistaken the enthusiasm isn't as great this year as usual. Is it the trophy?"

Bob could not avoid Mrs. Huston's penetrating gaze. She had a way of getting at the truth. He hesitated before responding reluctantly:

"Well, you can sense an undercurrent. The same number of girls as usual have signed up for the race, but something's wrong. I suspect it's Margery. She's thrown a wet blanket over the affair by hinting that you withdrew the locket because Gail wanted it."

"I suspected as much," Mrs. Huston returned quietly. "Oh, dear, why do these children take prizes so seriously?"

"Margery is the only one who really feels that way," Gail told her feelingly. "Her constant talking has influenced the others. It might be best to tell the entire story."

"No," Mrs. Huston decided firmly, "it isn't our story to tell. Besides, I don't feel called upon to make explanations for—"

She did not finish for there was an interruption. As

the front door jangled loudly, Gail half arose from her chair, only to sink back again as she realized that one of the maids would answer.

A murmur of voices in the front hall reached the inner room. Before Mrs. Huston could resume the conversation, a servant appeared to inform her that a young lady wished to see her.

"She says it is a matter of great importance," the maid repeated, presenting an engraved card.

Mrs. Huston glanced at it, then looked quickly up with an expression of startled wonder.

"This is very odd," she murmured. "The name is Virginia A. Wendell!"

OUT OF THE PAST

IF MRS. HUSTON had exploded a bombshell in the little sitting room, she scarcely could have produced a more startling effect. Joan, the first to recover from the announcement, stared down at the tiny white card which Mrs. Huston held. The name was clearly there, "Virginia A. Wendell," yet it was difficult to believe her own eyes.

"Perhaps it's a mistake," Mrs. Huston murmured in bewilderment.

"There couldn't very well be two persons with that name," Joan said quietly, trying to keep her voice calm. "It just means that our long quest is at an end. Virginia saw my advertisement after all."

"But she asked to see Mrs. Huston," Bob protested. "And you used your own name in the advertisement, didn't you?"

Joan looked baffled as her theory was blown to bits. Mrs. Huston turned to inquire of the maid if she had not misunderstood who the call was for.

"No, ma'am," the servant insisted firmly. "She handed me the card and asked me to take it to Mrs. Huston. She spoke your name real plain."

"What could have brought her here if not the advertisement?" Gail murmured in perplexity.

"It's beyond me," Mrs. Huston admitted. "But we mustn't keep her waiting. I'll go to her immediately."

Half way to the door she paused, noticing the dis-

appointed expressions on the faces of the girls. For weeks they had dreamed of a meeting with Virginia Wendell and now, because the caller had not inquired for them, they were to be denied the reward of their labors.

"Can't we go with you?" Gail asked.

Mrs. Huston tapped the calling card thoughtfully against the table edge while she was framing her reply. Joan spoke first, declaring that she did not think it would be tactful for them all to blunder in upon Virginia without some warning.

"It may be best for me to see her alone first," Mrs. Huston agreed. "But I'll have her come here to my sitting room and you three wait outside. At the first opportunity I'll find a means to introduce you."

This arrangement was satisfactory and without further ado the three slipped quietly out the side door. Gail paused to call back in a stage whisper:

"Whatever happens don't allow her to get away before we talk with her!"

It seemed to Bob and the girls that they waited fully an hour in the yard. They paced nervously up and down discussing the subject in excited whispers. Anxiously, they watched the sitting room window awaiting Mrs. Huston's signal. Several times Bob glanced at his watch. Ten minutes passed, then fifteen.

"What can they be saying in there?" Gail fumed. "This is our mystery and here at the most crucial moment we're out in the cold."

"The heat, you mean," Joan giggled nervously. "I can't really believe Virginia Wendell is here. We've been thinking and talking of her for weeks—but to really see her!"

"We haven't yet," Bob grinned. "Wonder what she looks like? Want to take a peek? I'll raise you up on my

shoulders, Gail, and you can look through the window."

"Well, I guess not!"

"If she ran away when she was seventeen she'd still be in her early twenties," Joan mused. "Oh, I'm dying to see her."

At that moment Mrs. Huston relieved the tension by appearing at the sitting room window. She smiled and beckoned. They made a wild rush for the steps, only to pause abashed before the closed door of her suite. No one wanted to be the first to enter.

Joan finally opened the door and let the group in. She looked unusually calm and possessed, but as she later told her companions, her heart was beating like a trip-hammer. She wondered what on earth she could say.

The visitor was seated opposite Mrs. Huston. For one awkward moment Joan and her friends could only stare. Was this youthful looking girl the Virginia of their diary? Mrs. Hodges had told them that she was pretty but they had never imagined she could be so very beautiful. They had thought of her first as an impetuous, troubled child, and later as a saddened young woman whose life had been ruined."

Virginia Wendell was far more at ease than they. Joan's eyes traveled instinctively to the girl's ungloved hand, noticing that she wore no ring.

"I came to inquire about a locket which I hear is being offered as a racing trophy," the girl began with a friendly smile, addressing the three impartially. "Mrs. Huston referred me to you."

They flashed Mrs. Huston a grateful glance. It was generous of her to refrain from divulging the story, that they might have the thrill of telling it themselves. The question regarding the locket troubled them. If Vir-

ginia had come to the Inn hoping to secure the trinket, she would be disappointed.

"I am Virginia Wendell," the girl introduced herself. "I am sure you have never heard of me before."

Joan and Gail could not restrain a knowing smile.

"On the contrary," the former said, "we have learned a great deal about you."

Virginia appeared at the point of asking for an explanation. Instead, she said hesitatingly:

"Doubtlessly, you wonder why I am interested in the locket. My father is a collector of antiques and jewels. Recently, I saw a photograph of the locket in a Miami paper, but I did not make up my mind to come here until today."

"A photograph?" Gail repeated in bewilderment. "Oh, yes, I remember now. A photographer from a Miami paper came here weeks ago and took several pictures. The race is given publicity all over the state."

"We have since replaced the locket with a silver loving cup," Mrs. Huston interposed hastily. "We realize that we should never have offered it as a prize, but we never dreamed the owner would return to claim it."

Virginia flushed, then laughed.

"I see that you have found me out. I am the owner and I have a very special reason for claiming it. I wish to return the contents to my father. I am so relieved that you still have it."

The young people looked at one another in embarrassment. They knew that they must tell the girl that the locket no longer was in their possession, and that would not be easy to do. Before Gail could plunge into the painful confession, Virginia asked quickly:

"May I inquire how you learned my name and so much

about me? You see, I took special pains to conceal my identity."

Joan explained that they had pieced bits of information together, gathering facts from the diary, newspaper accounts and even library books. Virginia did not seem offended at their interest in her private affairs. Yet she was startled momentarily when Joan reported their discovery of the gimmel ring.

"Dear me, you do know a great deal about my unhappy life," she said. "I think I owe you an explanation."

The young people were so eager for the story that she could not refuse them, even though the telling of it should prove to be a painful ordeal.

"I attribute all of my misfortune to that tiny ring which you found in the locket," Virginia began slowly. "At least I tell myself that, although in truth, I brought trouble upon myself."

"Our interest in the mystery was first aroused by discovery of the twin ring," Gail informed. We wondered what became of the missing half."

Too late, Joan flashed her a warning look. She could have bitten off her tongue at the slip, for she saw that the unfortunate reference had hurt Virginia. Yet the visitor forced a smile as she said with attempted lightness:

"Therein lies my story. If it will not bore you, I'll start at the very beginning."

"Bore us?" Joan echoed. "If only you knew how long we have waited for this story!"

There was a long moment of silence as Virginia sat staring out of the window, lost in reflection. It seemed hard for her to dip into the past.

"I was born in Bermuda," she said at length. "Mother died when I was twelve. Father brought me up as best

he could but the responsibility worried him and he was inclined to be too strict. As you already know, he was a noted collector. It was from him that I learned an appreciation of fine jewels. When I was fifteen he gave me the gold locket, a valuable heirloom, but it was the twin ring that I really craved.

"The ring has an unusual history. It dates back to the seventeenth century and once was worn by one of England's queens. The ring had been handed down in our particular family for generations, and the ancient betrothal custom had been kept up. Mother used it for her betrothal ring and had planned that I should use it for mine when the time came."

Virginia paused in her narrative, glancing down at her ringless third finger. She went quickly on:

"As you know, the ring is divisible into two distinct bands or rings. When Father and Mother were married years ago the two parts were reunited and until her death she wore the gimmel as one ring. She always said that on my eighteenth birthday or whenever my engagement were announced, the ring should be mine."

Virginia relapsed into silence again. The others did not speak and she went on again with difficulty.

"I developed an overpowering attachment for the twin ring, partially because it had been Mother's and partially upon account of its unique character and beauty. At the time I was very young and impressionistic. I must have been a sore trial to my father who feared that my impetuosity would lead me into some rash marriage. He was determined that I should marry wisely, and so, long before I was out of my 'teens, he selected a suitor whom he considered admirable."

Virginia laughed softly at the picture which flashed before her eyes, and hurried on:

"His name was Frorie Caldwell. He was many years older than I and very wealthy. I actually was afraid of him. Father could not understand my attitude. I imagine I might have been induced to marry Frorie had I not met David."

"The young man whose picture appears in the locket?" Joan inquired.

Virginia inclined her head. Her voice took on a softer note as she continued:

"We first met at the home of a friend. He was a young American and came of excellent family. He was staying in Bermuda only a few weeks, recovering from a brief illness, but we made the most of the short time which remained.

"Father learned of our frequent meetings, demanding that I give him up. David came to ask my hand in marriage. Father ordered him from the house. David then begged me to elope, but I could not do that—then. When he returned to America, he promised to return in a few months and force Father to our way of thinking.

"After David left, Father watched me more closely than ever. I know now he thought he was doing everything for the best, but I was very angry when he tried to force me into marriage with Frorie. David wrote repeatedly urging me to come to Miami where he was then employed, but as things were not going too well with him in a financial way, I hesitated.

"The months dragged on. David's letters came less frequently. Father became more insistent that I marry Frorie. I was only seventeen and doubtlessly very silly. Instead of trying to make Father realize how I felt, I determined to run away."

Again Virginia paused in her narrative and seemed

unable to continue. When finally she resumed the story, she avoided looking at her listeners.

"Impulsively, I wrote David telling him that I would meet him in Miami upon a certain day, and that we could be married there. As I was sealing the letter, I thought of the gimmal ring. I could not bear to leave it behind. I wanted it for my betrothal ring. Without realizing just what I was doing, I went to the case where Father kept it and removed it. The inner circle I enclosed in my letter to David, requesting him to retain it until the day of our marriage. The external disk, I kept.

"The night before Father hoped to announce my engagement to Frorie Caldwell, I ran away. There was no time to await a reply from David. I secured passage aboard *The Breneman* under the name of Freda Doraine, for I feared that Father might trace me to Miami and try to prevent the marriage. I intended to write him afterwards. Since you found that foolish little diary of mine, you know the rest. Frorie's brother Nicholas was on board the ship. I was afraid he might recognize me and send word back to Frorie or my father."

"And did he?" Gail questioned.

"No, my fears were groundless. I did not see him after *The Breneman* was wrecked. When the passengers were taken off, I arranged to get away as quickly as possible. I thought David would be waiting for me in Miami."

Virginia paused as though the end of her story had been reached, but the girls were by no means satisfied.

"And did you find him?" Joan inquired gently.

Virginia did not answer immediately. When she spoke, her voice was so low pitched that the words scarcely were audible.

"No, I never saw him again."

After that no one could frame a question, for unhappiness and grief plainly were stamped upon Virginia's face.

"I shall never know whether we missed each other, or whether he never came at all," she said quietly.

"Perhaps your letter went astray," Mrs. Huston suggested kindly.

"I have no way of knowing. I waited for more than a week, expecting that he would come. Even after that I did not give up hope. However, I had little money and was faced with the necessity of finding employment. There was so little that I was equipped to do. I did find a position open as governess in a wealthy family. They have been very good to me all these years."

"Then you have been in Miami all this while?" Mrs. Huston asked, wondering why her advertisement had never been answered.

"No, the family left there soon after I was employed. We remained in the north for several years. It was only three months ago that I returned to Miami."

"Then you must have seen the advertisement I ran in the Miami paper a short while ago," Joan suggested.

Virginia looked puzzled.

"I saw no advertisement, only the picture of my locket and the story about the race. I should have come sooner had I realized that my trunk and its contents had been saved. In fact, I would have given anything to have recovered the gimmel ring. I naturally assumed that all luggage was lost in the wreck."

"One question more," Joan said eagerly. "Why did you hide the diary and the locket in the secret compartment of your trunk?"

"I considered it the safest place. I suppose you were amazed to find the secret compartment. Father bought the trunk years ago because he was intrigued by that

very feature. He always had a liking for odd things. Our house in Bermuda is literally filled with old tables and desks, many of them with secret drawers."

Mrs. Huston could not refrain from asking a question which troubled her, although she knew the answer.

"Is it possible, Miss Wendell, that in all these years, you have lost contact with your father?"

"At first I was too ashamed to write," Virginia confessed. "I had taken the twin ring which actually had a high value, commercially as well as otherwise, and I was humiliated because David had failed me. Later, I was so lonely that I decided to write Father and beg his forgiveness. He ignored my letter. My pride forbade me to write again."

Bob and the girls exchanged astonished glances. Virginia's simple utterance threw a new light on the situation. Clearly Mr. Wendell had written in his letter that he had made every effort to locate his daughter.

"Your letter never reached him!" Joan blurted out. "We have proof of it."

For the first time since her arrival, Virginia became agitated. She begged Joan to tell her if she had any news of Mr. Wendell.

Quickly the girls related everything relative to the letter they had received that afternoon from Bermuda. Mrs. Huston found it in her desk and offered it to Virginia to read. When she finished, the young woman's eyes were filled with tears.

"How foolish I have been not to return home. Had it not been for the gimmal ring I should have gone long ago. Now, thanks to you who have taken an interest in my unhappy story, I may yet make up for some of the trouble and heartbreak I have caused. After reading this letter, I know Father will want me to come home."

Virginia folded the letter, falling into a deep silence which the others hesitated to break. At length the girl said with a forced smile: "You see, your little 'mystery' may have a pleasant ending after all."

Joan and her friends could not smile in return, realizing full well that while the whereabouts of David remained unknown, the ending could never be entirely happy.

"I must not take any more of your time," Virginia said apologetically. "If I may have the ring—"

The story of its loss no longer could be postponed. Gail plunged into her confession, the others making it as easy as they could for her by sharing in the blame.

Miss Wendell could not hide her disappointment. However, she refrained from adding to Gail's distress by uttering a word of blame.

"It was not your fault, I am sure. It is true I had hoped to recover the ring, but it was only a hope—not an expectation."

Miss Wendell glanced toward the window and for the first time observed that evening was fast approaching. Hastily, she arose.

"I did not mean to take so much of your time. Even though I did not recover the ring I feel that my trip was well worth while. I can't tell you how I appreciate—"

She did not finish, for just then there came a soft rap on the door. Joan opened it to admit the maid.

"I'm sorry to intrude," she apologized, "but a gentleman is outside. He asked to see Miss Gail, and if she were not in, Miss Joan."

"Who is it?" Gail questioned curiously.

"Mr. Balerton."

Virginia Wendell recoiled a step as she heard the name,

then checked herself. The color drained from her face, leaving it white and drawn.

"Mr. Balerton," she murmured brokenly. "Surely not *David* Balerton!"

AN EXPLANATION

SO MANY astounding things had occurred during the afternoon that Joan and her friends considered themselves hardened to all surprises. And yet Miss Wendell's strange utterance, coming like a bolt from the blue, completely electrified them.

Joan had mentioned several times to her friends that Mr. Balerton reminded her of someone she had seen, but never once had she connected him with the picture in the locket. Now that the thought had been suggested to her, she could recall a certain resemblance, but it was faint.

Miss Wendell read the doubt which plainly was mirrored upon the faces of the young people.

"The name startled me for an instant," she murmured apologetically. "Of course, it can't be the David Balerton I knew."

"If it is, you must see him," Joan said quickly. Her first doubt had given way to a definite conviction that Virginia might be right.

"No, he did not come here to see me," Virginia said with decision. "Even if he had, I couldn't see him now. It is too late." Nervously she began to draw on her gloves.

"Oh, you mustn't go now," Gail cried desperately. "Even if he isn't the man you knew, he's the one who has the gimmal ring—at least part of it! We tried to get it from him earlier today and were told he had left town."

Virginia hesitated, torn by indecision. Obviously, she wished to remain, yet was afraid.

"You must stay here at least until we learn why Mr. Balerton has come," Joan said decisively. "Gail can meet him in the front office."

"You must come with me," Gail told her friend. "I couldn't talk to him alone."

Virginia sank passively into a chair, seemingly too weary to protest. Before the girl could change her mind about not remaining, Gail and Joan quickly left.

Mr. Balerton was waiting in the little office at the front of Pirate Inn. They saw his car, loaded with fishing equipment, parked at the rear of the building.

He had been pacing the floor, but wheeled sharply as the girls entered. It was only natural that they should study him far more critically than before. His eyes were the same, they decided, and the shape of his head and face, but there the resemblance to the man in the locket seemed to end.

They did not know how to greet him, but Mr. Balerton was too intent upon his own mission to notice anything amiss in their attitude.

"I came to tell you that your locket has been recovered," he addressed Gail. "It was found in a most surprising place."

Gail heaved a great sigh of relief as she asked: "Where?"

"At the offices of the Costume Rental Agency. I was just starting on a little fishing trip when I thought I'd drop in at the post office where I have a lock box. I found a letter from this agency. It seems that in examining the Shakespearean costumes which I returned to them by express some days ago, they discovered your locket in the pocket of the costume you wore."

"Oh, how stupid of me!" Gail gasped. "I remember now! That's where I put it."

Mr. Balerton laughed as he removed a small, wrapped package from his pocket. The mailing seal had not been broken.

"This came from the Agency with the letter, so it must be your locket. I didn't take the time to open it."

"You haven't opened it?" Gail stammered, eyeing him as if she were actually seeing him for the first time. "Then that ring I saw in your wallet—the gimmal—why, you must be the man!"

Mr. Balerton looked bewildered. Gail did not try to explain. Instead, with fingers which shook, she untied the package and held up the locket. Still, Mr. Balerton did not seem to understand or recognize it. In desperation, Gail pressed upon the secret spring. The lid of the locket popped open to reveal the twin ring.

"Where did you get that?" Mr. Balerton demanded huskily, seizing upon the ring. "I have its counterpart—I am sure of it."

From his wallet he removed a similar ring, the one Gail had noticed that afternoon at the store. Before the fascinated eyes of the two girls, he snapped the two disks together into one band.

Questions and answers flew thick and fast after that. Together Joan and Gail poured out the story of how the locket and ring had been found aboard the wrecked *Breneman*, a story which they thought Mr. Balerton surely must have heard many times before.

"This is all news to me," he told them brusquely to hide the emotion in his voice. "I knew a locket was offered originally as the trophy in the Turkill Isle race, but I never heard an account of its history. I don't know how I missed the story unless it was that I made a point of never coming here and seldom reading anything printed about Pirate Inn. You see, I was deeply attached

to a girl who lost her life when *The Breneman* was wrecked."

If, on Virginia's account, Joan and Gail had felt the slightest resentment toward the man, it vanished instantly. They recognized that his matter-of-fact, almost brusque manner of speaking served to mask his real feelings.

Joan's impulse was to assure him that Virginia was very much alive but she held herself in check, determining to learn, if she could, how he still regarded the young woman.

"You are quite certain she is no longer living?"

"Quite," he responded. "Virginia was on her way to Miami to meet me. She wrote from Bermuda only a few days before the boat sailed. I was out of the city and did not receive the letter until nearly a week after the hurricane. I—I don't know why I'm telling you this. I have never told the story before."

"Please go on," Joan urged.

"When I learned that Virginia had been aboard *The Breneman* I came here as quickly as I could, but it was too late. She was the only passenger lost."

"How did you learn that?" Gail inquired.

"I saw it in a back issue of a newspaper. I even went to the office of *The Times* and talked with a reporter who wrote the story. He said he had it from the offices of the American Red Cross. No one could tell me anything definite, but it was believed that Virginia was lost overboard before the Coast Guard reached the scene. I talked with some of the men later and they were under the impression that every passenger had been rescued. This must have been a mistake for several passengers testified that Virginia never landed. The steamship people washed their hands of the affair by claiming that no such person as Virginia Wendell sailed aboard the ship."

"What did you do after that?" Joan questioned.

"What could I do? Life really wasn't worth living. I stayed on here, hoping to learn something more favorable about Virginia's disappearance. I made a few friends. Later when I was in another city a position opened up in the Crystal Beach High School and it was offered to me. I decided to try it for a year. I've had steady promotions which have kept me here. There, you have my story. That's all there is to tell about myself, save that I was in the War for three years—served as a flier. And now if you can tell me anything about Virginia, I'll be eternally grateful."

"We have a great deal to tell you," Joan assured him warmly, "but it must wait. Please come with us."

Somewhat mystified, David Balerton followed the girls down the hall. At the door of the sitting room they paused.

"Wait here," Joan commanded, "but in exactly three minutes open the door and walk in."

Before Mr. Balerton could protest at such queer action, the girls slipped inside, closing the door after them. With scarcely a word of explanation they herded Bob and Mrs. Huston out the rear door, leaving the surprised Virginia alone in the sitting room.

"What are you girls trying to do?" Mrs. Huston laughed.

"Just handling a situation with as much delicacy and as few words as possible," Gail chuckled. "It's the fade-out of our little romance and unless I miss my guess the ending will be a happy one."

There was ample time to explain to the others what had transpired in the front office, for nearly half an hour elapsed before Virginia and David Balerton emerged

from the sitting room. One glance at their happy faces told the girls that misunderstandings were past.

After that, everyone tried to talk and ask questions at once. Bob and the girls were forced to repeat their long story for Mr. Balerton's benefit and received high praise for their skill in piecing together the scattered bits of the puzzle.

"I can't see how the Red Cross made a mistake in names," Mr. Balerton declared after Joan had told him of their interview with Mr. Higgins.

"That's easily explained," Joan returned. "Mr. Higgins was the only person who knew that Virginia had left Crystal Beach. Undoubtedly you talked with other officials who were under the impression that Virginia was missing. The newspaper story came from that source too."

"What I can't understand is why you never recognized the locket," Gail broke in. "Didn't you see me wearing it the night of the play?"

"Perhaps I did, but paid no particular heed."

"David wouldn't remember the locket," Virginia spoke softly. "I'm sure he never saw me wear it. And he didn't know I kept his picture in it either."

"That snapshot!" Mr. Balerton said disdainfully. "It never did look like me even before I raised my moustache."

It was nearly nine o'clock before anyone thought of having dinner. Mrs. Huston insisted that the visitors dine at the Inn, an invitation they accepted gladly since so much still remained to be discussed.

"We may as well let you into a little secret," Mr. Balerton announced when the evening meal had been finished and they were all back in the comfortable living room again. "That ancient ring ceremony will be fulfilled tomorrow. Virginia and I have decided to be married with-

out another day's delay. My school work here is finished for the summer, so after the ceremony, we're leaving for Bermuda on the first boat."

Virginia was observed shaking her head vigorously in dissent.

"What?" Mr. Balerton inquired with concern. "You haven't changed your mind?"

"Only about the ring, David. I'd rather have a modern wedding ring now—just a plain gold band. The gimmal has brought me too much trouble. Besides, I have a very definite use for it. First of all, it goes back to Father. Then if he is willing, I am going to offer it to Joan and Gail."

At this announcement, the girls uttered a gasp of astonishment and delight. Then they held a brief whispered consultation and made the equally surprising declaration that they could not accept it.

"It's far too valuable a ring to give away," Joan insisted as spokesman for the two. "We feel it should be returned permanently to the Wendell collection. Gail and I appreciate the offer more than we can tell you, but we couldn't think of accepting."

Virginia was distressed.

"But I owe you so much and have so little to offer. I thought the twin ring would prove such a suitable gift. Each of you could wear one of the bands and it would serve always as a token of your friendship as well as a reminder of the mystery which you solved."

As she spoke, Virginia held up the gimmal ring with the two disks joined for them to see. Joan and Gail were sorely tempted, but they staunchly maintained their stand.

"Perhaps I can find some way to make you take it later. The only other thing I have to offer is the locket, but it is far less valuable. However, it is my very own.

I do not need to ask Father's permission to give it away."

"We don't want any reward," Gail declared firmly. "We can't accept the locket either."

Virginia looked genuinely disturbed and turned appealing eyes upon Mrs. Huston.

"Then you must keep the locket. If not for yourself, offer it as a trophy in the race as you originally planned."

Mrs. Huston hesitated, glancing questioningly toward Bob and the girls. She could see that this suggestion was more to their liking.

"I see you will take it," Virginia cried before anyone had time to refuse. "The race is tomorrow, isn't it? Of course, I don't mean to disrupt your plans. If you prefer a loving cup to the locket—"

"Oh, but we don't," Gail and Joan cried together. "Everyone wants the locket. That's why no one person can accept it as a gift."

Virginia smiled in relief.

"Then it's settled. The locket will make a lovely keepsake for some girl even if it isn't as valuable as the twin ring. I do hope one of you win it tomorrow. David and I will be on hand to watch the race."

Bob glanced at his watch and hastily arose.

"It's not too late to pass word around yet tonight about the locket," he said. "Unless I'm mistaken it should be things up for tomorrow. I'll see how much broadcasting I can do between now and dawn."

He cast a troubled glance in Joan's direction as he turned to leave.

"Better get to bed early if you can. You'll need your rest."

Shortly after Bob had left, Virginia and Mr. Balerton took their departure, promising again that they would not miss the race the following afternoon.

No sooner had the door closed behind them than Gail and Joan gave way to their long suppressed emotions. They clutched each other and capered madly about until Mrs. Huston declared that the ceiling would fall.

"Did ever so many wonderful things happen before in one day?" Joan sighed contentedly as she sagged into the nearest chair. "All the time they were here I was just dying to let out one enormous whoop!"

"Better save some of that energy for tomorrow," Mrs. Huston laughed. "Even if the mystery is solved the locket isn't won."

Joan sobered instantly.

"I'll do my very best tomorrow."

"Do you think your shoulder will handicap you very much?" Gail asked anxiously.

"My shoulder! Why, I'd forgotten all about it. It doesn't hurt like it did."

Gail caught her chum by the hand, dragging her to her feet.

"You must get to bed this instant," she ordered. "First I'm going to massage that shoulder and then you must go straight to sleep."

"Sleep?" Joan groaned, permitting herself to be dragged away. "Who ever heard of such a dull way to end a perfectly gorgeous day?"

THE RACE

JOAN awoke early with a feeling of both elation and dread. It was the morning of the Turkill Isle race. She ran to the window and looked out. A dazzling sun made the deep blue waters of the bay sparkle, but a brisk wind was churning up high waves.

Gail who had been awake for some minutes, sprang from bed, joining her chum at the window.

"Oh, it's a lovely day except for that hateful wind! How does your shoulder feel this morning?"

"Fine as silk." Joan moved her arm experimentally in a wide circle. She still could feel a faint twinge of pain but she did not intend to trouble Gail by telling her so.

"We must have breakfast right away," Gail directed authoritatively. "I'm going to bring you a tray."

"You are not," the other contradicted. "I'm not a *prima donna*."

"You are a potential champion and must be treated as such. However, I'd not advise much breakfast. The waves are almost certain to be choppy."

"I'll only take a little orange juice and perhaps a poached egg," Joan promised, "though I'm as hungry as a bear."

She would not permit Gail to serve her in bed, insisting upon going downstairs as usual. They lingered over breakfast and then were forced to hurry in order to reach the beach in time for the race.

If Mrs. Huston or Bob had felt any qualms concerning

the success of the coming event, it was dispelled when they viewed the crowd which had gathered along the water front. Fully an hour before the race was scheduled to start, rows of parked cars were visible along shore. Throngs of persons crowded the pier, jostling for advantageous positions. Gaily decorated motor-boats and an occasional sailing craft plied in and out of the bay.

In particular the attention of watchers was directed toward a sleek, newly painted motor-boat which picked its way daintily along shore. The proud helmsman, easily recognized as Bob Bartley, beamed this way and that at friends who called out greetings as the boat idled past.

"Hi, Bob, where did you steal your yacht?" someone shouted.

He did not answer for he had sighted Joan and Gail in the crowd. He picked them up, enjoying their amazed expressions as they tested the softness of the new seats. They had known that for many months he had been hoarding his money, but had never dreamed that the day would ever come when he would actually part with his beloved *Dying Swan*. Bob beamed at the extravagant compliments which they bestowed upon the new boat.

As the time approached for the start of the race, the crowd along shore became more dense. Bob had spread the news that the gold locket was to be awarded the girl who placed first, and as he had anticipated, the announcement served to intensify interest, especially among the swimmers.

Margery Annas was particularly jubilant over the change in trophies. She stood near the wharf talking earnestly with her trainer. Nearly all of the remaining swimmers entered in the race, sat along the dock, nervously intent upon watching the white-uniformed officials.

Joan remained with Bob and Gail, preferring not to

join the contestants until the last minute. She shivered a little in her bathing suit.

"For mercy sakes, don't do that!" Gail commanded severely, reaching out to wrap Joan's robe more tightly about her.

"I'm not c-cold. I'm scared."

"Snap out of it," Bob advised with kindly bluntness. "This is no time to develop nerves. It won't be a killing matter even if you don't win."

He frowned slightly as he studied the course over which the race must be swum. The rough water did not favor victory for Joan. Besides that, the pain in her shoulder might return to plague her.

"We want you to have that locket," Gail remarked comfortingly. "You know the reason why. But if you can't win it in your natural stride—why let Margery have it."

"Not if I can help it," Joan said grimly. "I'll do my best."

"And you'll win!" Bob said quickly. "Gail and I will be right behind you all the time in the row-boat. While we're not allowed to give you any help or advice once the race starts, you'll know we're pulling for you all the way."

He glanced toward Margery Annas who still was talking soberly with her trainer.

"Here's a last piece of advice, Joan. Swim your own race. Don't worry about what Margery or the others are doing. Set your own pace—the pace you've found that you can maintain. The going will be hard today. Save your energy so you'll still have something to spare for that last quarter mile. Now go to it—and good luck!"

Joan took leave of her friends that they might have

ample time to transfer to the row-boat which according to the rules of the race must follow each contestant.

With her bathrobe wrapped tightly about her slim body, she moved through the crowd, joining the group at the wharf. She was none too soon. A man with a large megaphone announced that the swimmers must take their places for the start of the race.

One by one the names were called. In all there were fifteen girls who were competing. Joan's name came next to Margery's on the list so they took their position side by side at the edge of the wharf.

An official reviewed the rules. He told the girls they must round Turkill Isle and return to the finishing line at the dock. He warned them again that they would be disqualified for interfering with another swimmer or for accepting aid from a boat. The boatmen were instructed that they must keep back the specified distance unless a girl signified that she was dropping from the race.

"The signal will be 'Swimmers Ready' and a fast gun!" the official ended.

Joan and her companions crouched, nerves taut, ready for the plunge.

The starting official stepped back a pace with pistol raised. As the warning signal rang out, Joan already was slightly off balance. Crack! The firing of the pistol found her in mid-air. She struck the water a little flat in true racing style, and without wasting an instant beneath the surface, struck out.

It felt good to be in the water at last. Joan resisted the temptation to sprint. She had beaten everyone to the gun and it would be pleasant to maintain the lead. The water about her was fairly teeming with bobbing heads.

Before Joan had taken many strokes Margery and at least six unidentified swimmers had forged ahead of her.

Instinctively, she quickened her stroke, then swung back into her old slow rhythm. At the start of a race everyone was nervous, over-anxious; many of these fast starters soon would lag. She did not want to be one of them. Yet it was hard to see Margery Annas take the lead so early in the race.

Gradually, the water became less congested as the swimmers spread out. A distance off shore the waves began to get higher but they did not trouble Joan as much as she had anticipated. Now and then one completely buried her. She timed her breathing perfectly and did not lose the steady rhythm of her stroke.

However, the rough water made for a slower race. Many of the weaker swimmers soon lagged far behind. At the end of the first quarter-mile, Joan without any special effort on her part, was well up among the leaders. But there were at least six girls ahead, with Margery leading the group by at least fifty yards.

"I'm paying entirely too much attention to what the others are doing," Joan told herself sternly. "Each time I lift my head to look, I lose just that much time."

Resolutely, she concentrated entirely upon her stroke, and was elated to find how easily her body slipped through the waves. There was a little trick to it. She was not as much at home in rough water as were many of her opponents, yet their advantage did not worry her. She had gained her "second wind" now and felt that she could swim any distance without tiring.

Joan had determined to pay no heed to the others, but it annoyed her that several swimmers kept so far ahead of her. Had it not been for Bob's last admonition, she would have increased her speed.

At the end of the second quarter-mile, Joan became aware that gradually she was creeping up on several of

the swimmers. Soon with no increased effort on her part, she took fourth place and held it. This satisfied her for the time being and she did not waste time trying to see what had become of Margery who still led the field. She knew her rival had gained a discouraging distance, yet told herself that the time had not arrived for the real test of courage and strength.

Joan rounded Turkill Isle still in fourth position. Her stroke had become mechanical, her breathing regular and deep. She had tried to relax all the way, but despite her best efforts, her arms were tiring. Her shoulder muscle was beginning to hurt again. She found herself favoring the arm, gliding longer between strokes, prolonging the moment when her mouth was out of water, that she might obtain a more satisfying breath. A neck muscle too was giving her considerable annoyance. In the face of increasing weariness and discomfort, she knew that if she were to win the race, she must begin to forge ahead.

The field had fallen far behind now. Many of the girls had been picked up by their boatmen and were out of the contest. It was evident that the race lay between the first five or six swimmers, with the odds in favor of Margery Annas who continued to lead by a wide margin.

"It's now or never," Joan told herself grimly.

Having settled into a comfortable pace it was not easy to quicken her stroke, but she accomplished it by pulling harder with her arms and thrashing faster with her legs. She was gratified to see that slowly she gained upon the swimmer directly ahead. Before many minutes had elapsed she passed her.

After that, Joan was forced to content herself with third position. For a time she considered that she was doing well to hold it for she was closely pressed from behind. She dared not swim faster lest her wind give

out just when she needed it most. She must save reserve power for the final sprint.

She kept pluckily on at a steady pace, marveling that the girl directly ahead and Margery Annas could swim so tirelessly. The waves seemed higher on the home stretch. They buffeted her about and wore her down, yet she consoled herself that the going was no easier for the others.

After a time she lifted her head long enough to look toward shore and was alarmed to see that the wharf was closer than she had expected. It was time to sprint a little. And yet, could she? She had not realized how very tired a person could be. Pains were shooting through her arm; she dared not tax it too heavily.

For an instant, Joan scarcely cared whether she won or lost the race. She longed to turn over upon her back, signaling Gail and Bob to pick her up in the row-boat.

"The end of a long race is always the test of a swimmer's courage," she thought grimly. "I'll not give up now with only a few more yards to go!"

The reserve energy which she had been storing away came to her aid. Now that her brain had given the signal to sprint, muscles blindly obeyed. Gradually, Joan forged ahead.

Suddenly she was elated to find herself nearly even with her nearest opponent. The girl seemed winded. She had set herself too fast a pace. A few long strokes and Joan passed her to take second position.

Only Margery Annas remained to be conquered. Observing the distance which separated them, Joan experienced serious misgivings. Margery had maintained a lead from the very start of the race and showed not the slightest indication of weakening. Joan knew that if she were to reach the finish line ahead of her opponent, she must

call upon every iota of will power and strength at her command.

She began to put everything she had into each stroke, pulling with more force than before, throwing her weight into each powerful arm sweep. She counted to herself—one—two—three, kick—kick—kick. It helped to keep her mind from those protesting muscles which threatened to rebel.

"I'm gaining!" Joan thought exultingly. The knowledge gave her new courage.

Slowly the distance diminished between the two swimmers. Margery was worried now. Frequently she looked back over her shoulder, observing how closely she was being pressed. Each time she looked back, Joan gained.

A supreme effort brought her even with Margery, but try as she would, she could not gain an inch. Margery struggled desperately to maintain first place.

Joan could hear the wild cheers of the crowd, the tooting of horns and whistles. That meant that the wharf was very near. She dared not look.

Gathering everything for the final brief sprint, she increased the rapidity of her leg thrash, shifting from the six to the eight-beat crawl.

Margery, too, heard the wild cheering. The temptation to look could not be overcome. She raised her head slightly from the water, and in so doing threw herself out of the smooth rhythm she had maintained. Slight as was the break, it gave Joan her opportunity. She forged ahead. The wharf loomed up. She lunged for the finish line and the race was hers!

Friendly hands dragged her from the water. A bathrobe was flung over her shoulders. Automobile horns and boat whistles tooted their staccato congratulations. A photographer from a newspaper snapped several pictures

before she could protest. Acquaintances pushed through the crowd to offer praise.

Joan was somewhat confused by so much attention and was vastly relieved when Bob and Gail rescued her from the admiring throng.

"You were wonderful!" Gail cried, hugging her convulsively. "When I saw you take the lead I nearly jumped out of the boat I was so excited."

"It was a good race," Bob beamed. "I'm proud to have coached you."

"I'd never have won if you hadn't," Joan declared warmly. "I can't really believe yet that I did it."

"You did all right," Gail assured her with a laugh. "And best of all, the locket is yours! I think they want you now for the formal presentation."

Joan was led away by an official, but after she had responded graciously to the speech of presentation and had been wildly cheered again, she was permitted to return to her friends.

Others crowded about, including many of the contestants in the race. Everyone seemed to be glad that she had won. Joan was surprised when Margery came over and offered her hand.

"Congratulations. It was a fine race and you deserved to win. I guess I acted rather like a boor but I do hope you'll not hold it against me. And next summer if you're here, we'll race again."

Joan gripped the extended hand, making an appropriate response. She really held no grudge and was pleased that Margery took a sporting attitude in defeat.

The crowd was so large that Joan and her friends failed to see Virginia Wendell and David Balerton at the water front. However, soon after their return to Pirate Inn, the couple appeared to congratulate Joan and also to

announce their marriage which had taken place early that morning.

"We couldn't wait another minute," Virginia explained. "We've waited too long as it is."

Mrs. Huston insisted that the couple remain at Pirate Inn to partake of what she termed a "victory" dinner. Bob too was invited.

Afterwards, all went to the storeroom where Virginia's trunk had been replaced. In sorting over her old possessions, she found nothing she wished to take with her save the diary.

At a late hour that evening the couple said good-bye to Mrs. Huston for they planned to go to Charleston by night train, sailing from there to Bermuda on their honeymoon voyage. They promised faithfully that they would return to Crystal Beach within a few months, bringing Mr. Wendell with them.

Bob and the girls accompanied them to the railroad station. As the train was coming in, Virginia opened her purse, removing a tiny box.

"I have a little parting gift for you girls," she said hurriedly. "I do hope you won't refuse to accept it."

Joan opened the box.

"Why, it's your gimmal ring!" she cried protestingly. "We can't take it, you know."

Virginia smiled. "No, it isn't the gimmal ring, but shall we say its twin? David and I wanted you both to have some memento of your adventure. We made a special trip to the city to have a jeweler make up this duplicate. It doesn't have the value of the original, of course, but see! the two disks fit together exactly the same way as the twin ring."

Deftly, she detached the two circles, slipping one over Gail's finger.

"It's just a little friendship ring, but I thought you might like it."

Joan and Gail stammered their thanks. Before they could half express their appreciation, David and Virginia hurried away to catch their train. Bob and the girls stood on the track, waving until the observation car no longer was in sight.

"Well, there goes our adventure," Gail said with a blissful sigh as they turned away. "But it's not really the end of the gimmal ring, for we'll always have these darling twin bands to remind us of it."

"We'd never have felt right to have accepted the original heirloom," Joan added. She glanced mischievously at Gail. "After all that's happened here this summer, do you still call Crystal Beach dull?"

Gail laughed as the three friends linked arms and walked slowly toward the twinkling lights of Pirate Inn.

"No," she answered, "you've taught me to appreciate my environment."

THE END